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**‘Unbreakable Bones:  
Christian Mission and the Resilience of Temi Culture’**

Klaus-Peter Derungs

OCMS, Ph.D

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis is concerned with the Batemi of northern Tanzania and the symbols through which they assign meaning in their world. At the centre of the research lies the inquiry of how the Batemi reproduce their individual and communal identity through practices and beliefs in the context of a modernizing post-colonial nation-state. Interacting amongst themselves and with their immediate neighbours – primarily the Maasai – the Batemi show a remarkable resilience in promoting their own choices which are based on their customs, called *gitemi*.

The research is based on a long-term involvement with the Batemi and draws from a multitude of collected empirical material, interviews, participant observation, historical materials, and on the insights gained from discussions with Temi contributors. The investigation combines primary data revealing the Batemi's insights and interpretations of their culture along with my own reflections and understanding of the significance of core processes that shape Temi self-understanding.

The Batemi are often portrayed as an unusually hard case of successful resistance against Christianity and Westernization at a time when the majority of other Tanzanian people groups have undergone significant change after having been affected by Christianity. In the encounter between the Batemi and outside observers (colonial personnel, anthropologists and missionaries), the latter portrayed Temi religion almost exclusively as a set of beliefs in a divine being called Ghambageu. Convinced that Ghambageu provided an opportune analogy to communicate a Christian gospel, the missionaries focused on a comparison between Jesus and Ghambageu in their attempt to evangelize the Batemi. However, this study concludes that the core of Temi religion, and indeed of their culture, is tied up with activities and beliefs surrounding the Kirimo rituals, rather than with the myths of Ghambageu. Furthermore, I suggest that it is this misguided notion of Temi religion which ultimately led to a failure to establish a viable church among the Batemi.

The study calls for a reappraisal of the Christian mission approach to traditional African communities like the Batemi, and an invitation to re-evaluate a dogmatic concept of religion in the light of the presented Temi religious phenomenon.



**‘Unbreakable Bones:  
Christian Mission and the Resilience of Temi Culture’**

**by**

**Klaus-Peter Derungs**

First Supervisor: Dr Ben Knighton    Second Supervisor: Dr Edward Ontita  
Director of Studies: Dr David Singh

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at Middlesex University

October 2016  
Oxford Centre for Mission Studies



## DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed K. f. g. (Candidate)  
Date 31 Oct 2016

## STATEMENT ONE

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Date 31 Oct 2016

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## **DEDICATION**

To Christine, my wife and a fellow explorer of Temi culture, for the companionship during this long journey, and for her support and love throughout these years.

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## GITEMI LANGUAGE AND ORTHOGRAPHY <sup>1</sup>

Gitemi is spoken by about 30,000 people, most of whom live in the Ngorongoro district of the Arusha region in northern Tanzania.<sup>2</sup> According to *The Classification of Bantu Languages* (Guthrie, 1948), Gitemi was classified as an E40 Language, thus belonging to the languages at the Eastern side of Lake Victoria. Among these it most closely resembles Ikoma and Ikizu. Later, in *Comparative Bantu* (1971), Gitemi was reassigned to the E50 languages of central Kenya; namely, Gikuyu, Kamba, and Tharaka. As of today, only one comprehensive linguistic description of the Gitemi language has been published (Nurse & Rottland, 1991).

In the *Ethnologue*<sup>3</sup>, Gitemi was once again reassigned as E46. There it is listed under the alternate language name ‘Temi’, where it is also referred to as ‘Kisonjo’. The language is classed as vigorous.

A phonemic Gitemi orthography was developed by the author in 1999. The alphabet closely resembles that of Swahili, with the purpose of enabling Batemi to make an easy transition from reading Swahili to reading their mother tongue. Gitemi has seven phonemic vowels: /a/, /e/, /ɛ/, /i/, /o/, /ɔ/, /u/. Therefore, compared to Swahili there are two ‘extra’ vowels in Gitemi, ε and ɔ, for which the IPA symbols have been used. The following English words provide an approximate pronunciation guide for vowels:

*a* as in ‘father’  
*e* as in ‘face’  
*ɛ* as in ‘square’  
*i* as in ‘me’  
*o* as in ‘older’  
*ɔ* as in ‘awe’  
*u* as in ‘noon’

---

<sup>1</sup> A recently uploaded website dedicated to the Gitemi language makes Temi literature and songs available to anyone interested. A trilingual dictionary (Gitemi-Swahili-English) upload is in the planning. See [www.Gitemilanguage.com](http://www.Gitemilanguage.com)

<sup>2</sup> According to a linguistic survey of 1996, Gitemi showed a high degree of viability as it was the preferred language used at home and in public discussions (Caston et al. 1996).

<sup>3</sup> (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2015) or [www.ethnologue.com/language/soz](http://www.ethnologue.com/language/soz)



There are fourteen orthographic consonants which are as follows: *b, d, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, r, s, t, w,* and *y*. These are all pronounced roughly as they would be in English, with a few exceptions where consonants are combined as digraphs:

*gh* as in the German ‘ach’  
*ny* as in ‘canyon’  
*ng*’ as in ‘sang’  
*sy* as in ‘shelter’

Typical of a Bantu language, Gitemi nouns belong to one of seventeen noun classes. Of these, I would like to highlight only the three sets of noun classes which will appear most often in the text.

Classes 1 & 2 comprise primarily humans

Class	Prefix	Gitemi example	English
1 (singular)	<i>m-, mo-, mu-</i>	<i>monto</i>	person
2 (plural)	<i>ba-</i>	<i>bantu</i>	people
1	<i>mu-</i>	<i>Mutemi</i>	Mutemi
2	<i>ba-</i>	<i>Batemi</i>	Batemi

Classes 3 & 4 include most plants and farming terminology

Class	Prefix	Gitemi example	English
3 (singular)	<i>mu-</i>	<i>mugonda</i>	field
4 (plural)	<i>mi-</i>	<i>migonda</i>	fields
3	<i>mu-</i>	<i>mute</i>	tree
4	<i>mi-</i>	<i>mite</i>	trees

Classes 7 & 8 denote inanimate objects and also languages

Class	Prefix	Gitemi example	English
7 (singular)	<i>ki-</i>	<i>kintɔ</i>	thing
8 (plural)	<i>bi-</i>	<i>bintɔ</i>	things
7	<i>gi-</i>	<i>gitemi</i>	Temi traditions, Gitemi language

There is a characteristic of Gitemi texts which defies translation – its abundance of idiophones. Thus *kwæɛ!* means ‘suddenly there was light’. *Titisi!* is the sound of a crowd of people. And the sound of something snapping back into place is *subu!* In the appendix, where the idiophones are heavily interspersed in the myths, initiation accounts, and interviews, most of them have been left un-translated so as not to distract from the narrative flow.

In order to differentiate between Temi language and Temi traditional practices, the following convention is applied: Gitemi or Temi (in its adjectival form) refers to the language, whereas *gitemi* denotes the tradition. All names of Temi places and divinities are capitalized and spelled without the use of the extra vowels, e.g. Ebwe, instead of Ebwe.

A dictionary with over 4,300 entries of Gitemi words and idioms has been compiled and will be available online in the near future. A glossary of the most important Gitemi words is found in Appendix 11.1.

## **PLACE NAMES (GITEMI AND MAASAI)**

Beelwa: 1) mythical place of origin 2) place near Hume in Kenya

Butemine: Sonjo area

Ebwe: village of Digodigo

Eroghata: village of Sale

Ghandabung'eeda: ancient name of Ebwe

Ghandamuri: ancient name of Ebwe

Kura: village of Oldonyo Sambu

Mageri: village name

Masaba: 1) mythical place of origin, Mt. Elgon 2) forest, thicket

Masing'ane: mythical place of origin near Lake Natron

Mugongo jwa Mugwe: mountain of God, Oldonyo L'engai

Mugongo: village of Mugongo

Mugholo: village of Gheeri, (in Potkanski) Moholo, (in Gray) Digodigo Chini

Muntarija: bush-land between Soyeta and Ebwe, used for burying strangers

Raghari: village of Kisangiro

Soyeta: village of Samunge

Tinaga: village name

The peculiarity of the place given to belief in Christian history is a monumental matter, whose importance and relative uniqueness must be appreciated. So characteristic has it been that unsuspecting Westerners have ... been liable to ask about a religious group other than their own as well, 'What do they believe?' as though this were the primary question, and certainly were a legitimate one.  
(W. C. Smith 1991)

The interaction process, therefore, in the concept of cultures is exceedingly complex, no one ever knows exactly what is happening, and serious misunderstandings occur on both sides without anyone realizing that they are misunderstanding.  
(H. W. Turner 1978)

It is certainly ritual, with its symbols that constitutes the heart of religion. Ritual, long neglected in favour of descriptions of myth and belief, must be reconsidered. And that is not all. All rites are social rites, even individual ones. The worst fault a study can show is to neglect the thorough study of the society before analysing the religion ... It has become clear that in Africa social structures and religion are aspects of a single thing: a human community living the drama of its own existence.  
(Vansina in MacGaffey 1986)

*Gitemi* has power!  
(SM, Ebwe elder)

# Chapter 1

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND STUDY PROCESS

### 1.1 Introduction

The history of Christian mission in Africa and the interaction between Western and African cultures is discordant, jangling with miscommunication and misunderstanding. This is especially true when it comes to the communication of religious concepts, when for example, culturally conditioned ideas about religion are applied as universal principles. One outcome of such intercultural misinterpretation is the surprise – or disappointment – when missionaries realise that the result of their mission efforts does not correspond with their experiences or intentions. Thus, African people may reject the Gospel for reasons unimaginable to the missionary. On the other hand, if Christianity is accommodated, the new church may merge Christian signs with local practices and beliefs to create new symbols (Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Hodgson 2005; Spear and Kimambo 1999; Ranger et al. 1976).

The presented research is in this sense a case study, the ‘hard’ case of one African group, the Batemi of Tanzania, who have essentially rejected the Gospel and withstood the inundation of Christianization. Unlike so many other East African societies that have allowed Christian beliefs to change their societies, the Batemi have resisted such a cultural intrusion. The reason for this rejection should not be reduced to one single cause. However, I suggest that rather than seeing Christianity as incompatible with Temi culture, it was the mode in which it was presented to them – namely as a set of beliefs which was to replace those held by the Batemi – that has led to the elders’ decision not to accept Christianity. Alternatively, I examine how the core of Temi religion lies with the *gitemi* customs and the rituals of Kirimo, the religious practice by which the Batemi reproduce their culture. Kirimo rituals are associated with secrecy and male supremacy, gender formation and the mystery of human procreation. The Batemi consider these activities as their own local affairs and therefore withhold them from outsiders. Instead, in the past the Batemi shared with the colonialists, missionaries, and anthropologists a version that fit a Western template of religion, namely the stories of Ghambageu, one of their most prominent divinities.

In this first chapter I will present the research questions and outline the methodological principles applied in this thesis. Furthermore, I will define key concepts, summarize relevant literature about the Batemi, and refer to social theories from which I have drawn inspiration. Finally, I will outline the organization of the thesis.

## 1.2 Research questions

Outside observers have perceived Temi religion in comparison with religious convictions and practices which derived from their own cultural matrix (Gray 1966; Gray 1963; Bowen and McLaren 2011; Donovan 2003; Vähäkangas 2008a; Vähäkangas 2008b). Such Eurocentric perspectives led them to search and represent the religious traditions of the Batemi in particular ways. Robert Gray, for example, concluded that Temi religion is ‘a conservative force which acts to maintain the *status quo* culturally and socially’ and ‘provides a safeguard against disastrous change; for the social and ecological adjustment of the society is so delicately balanced that any change might constitute a threat to the livelihood of the people’ (1974a, 126). In other words, Temi religion was thought of as a set of beliefs and rituals that was indispensable to Temi community and served as social ‘stabiliser’ that motivated the indigenous community enough to preserve these religious traditions over time. Missionaries, such as Vincent Donovan, concentrated especially on the co-relation of Temi and Christian beliefs, assuming that this was the avenue through which the Gospel should be communicated effectively. One notable outcome of this evangelistic effort was the formulation of a Christian creed in the vernacular language Gitemi (Bowen and McLaren 2011, 157). Central to the missionary deliberations was a comparison between Ghambageu and Jesus Christ and their respective messianic character traits, with the purpose of making the Christian message relevant to the Batemi.<sup>1</sup>

My research question thus emerges from the encounter between outside observers with Temi culture over the last 70 years and their representation of Temi culture:

- 1) What is the nature of Temi religion, and how is it best represented?

---

<sup>1</sup> Even Schäfer, who is not as such interested in religious concepts, tends to think that belief in Ghambageu is a primary component of their cultural identity (Schäfer 1999c, 265).

- 2) How was Temi religion and culture approached and represented by outsider observers and what methodologies were used?
- 3) How do these earlier portrayals and reports differ from my own findings?

Growing out of the pursuit of these central questions are the following inquiries:

- What are the most significant institutions, rituals and ceremonies of the Batemi and why are they important?
- How are Temi religious institutions and political governance intertwined?
- What is the role and status of churches in the community and what is their perception of Temi religion?
- How and why have the interventions of government and churches not been able to disrupt Temi traditions?

### **1.3 Religion in Africa and Temi religion in particular**

African societies have for a long time been perceived as *incurably* (Parrinder 1970) or *notoriously* religious (Mbiti 1969). Such notions of African people as wholly religious persist until today, despite some convincing evidence that for some African communities this may not be true (Shorter and Onyancha 1997; p'Bitek 1970; Platvoet and Rinsum 2003; Cox and Haar 2003; Cox 2014). This myth of a universal and ubiquitous religiosity in Africa went hand in hand with a contrasting view of the simultaneous demise of religion in European countries, a generalisation which is equally an overstatement. Early traders, anthropologists, and missionaries – each in varying forms and capacities – have represented an ahistorical, romantic view of African traditional religion. Furthermore, anthropology with its functional theory contributed to a paradigm of African religion as static, self-regulating and socially integral. Dutch researchers such as Platvoet and Van Binsbergen, Wijzen, Pels, and others have attempted to correct this one-sided picture of an incurably and notoriously religious Africa in numerous publications (cf. Platvoet 1990, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2004a, 2004b; Platvoet and Toorn 1995; van Binsbergen 1981; 2004; van Binsbergen and van Dijk 2004; van Dijk and Pels 1996; Wijzen 1993, 2000, 2007, 2011).

Scholars of religion and African theologians ordered the multitude of African religious expressions by creating unifying categories, consequently subsuming all

indigenous religions as ATR (African Traditional Religions or African Indigenous Religions) (Parrinder 1976; Mbiti 1970b). This comparative approach of fashioning African religions after a Judeo-Christian template resulted in a dogmatic idea of commonalities of African religious expressions. At the same time, African religions were stripped of the historical and cultural context in which they emerged. According to Rosalind Shaw, images and ideas about 'African Traditional Religion' were the result of a 'paradigmatic status accorded in religious studies to the Judeo Christian tradition and of the associated view of 'religion as text' (1990, 339). Ranger similarly critiques that two of the gravest misconceptions about the character of African religions lay in the idea that they are geographically confined to individual people groups, and that African religious traditions were without history. He and other scholars established that such a model was inadequate to describe the powerful dynamic and kaleidoscopic religious expression of African societies (Ranger 1970; Ranger et al. 1976; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Platvoet and Molendijk 1999; Sutherland and Clarke 2016). One particularly substantial criticism of Western interpretations of African religion came from the Ugandan poet and anthropologist Okot p'Bitek, who suggested that the hegemonic approach towards African religious traditions amounted to a 'Hellenization of African deities' because African deities are attributed with the same character traits as the Christian God (p'Bitek 1970, 80).

Jan Platvoet, likely the most erudite scholar on the history of African religion, described African religion in the following key characteristics (see Platvoet 1993). African indigenous religions are undifferentiated from other parts of social life, i.e. they are co-extensive with their societies. They include not only the living, but also what the community understands to be a variety of spiritual forces, foremost the ancestors. Being spread across all cultural domains, African religions have a low visibility and are not easily recognizable to the outsider. They are pragmatic in the sense that they seek to provide material and tangible benefits which promote the harmony and wellbeing of society. The relationship between the community and the spirits is marked by mutual reciprocity. Generally this means that the community must provide gifts to the spirits, often in the form of sacrificed animals or through the pouring of libations, as a sign of respect and remembrance. In return, the spirits provide protection and material beneficence for the community. Beliefs are not articulated, but remain implicit. Hence, there are no doctrines, theologies, claims to truth or factional disputes between sects. African indigenous religious are non-missionary in their intent. And finally, according to Platvoet, African indigenous religions are adoptive and adaptive. They have an open

mind towards other religions and import the deities and practices of other people readily, integrating them into their own complex system. They are also able to accommodate new factors, including the modernization process, without losing their essential identity.

With regard to the present research, religion is conceived as a phenomenon which is anchored in and gravitates toward local space, symbols, language, behaviour, and history, rather than simply representing an ideology, a system of beliefs, a ‘symbolic system’ (Geertz), an ‘awareness of the transcendent’ (Tambiah), or a ‘feeling of the numinous’ (Otto). The question with which Temi religion is best approached can be stated like this: What are the practices and beliefs the Batemi employ in order to come to terms with the ultimate problems of human life? And, how do these practices and beliefs reflect on ultimate social values which cannot be expressed in non-religious terms?

The Batemi, as in fact most African societies, do not have an analogous concept that resembles an Enlightenment Western idea of religion. Instead, they use their own vernacular terms that refer to ritual activities or ceremonies through which they communicate with divinities (Bagwe) and bring order and/or transformation to their society. The main rituals are called *ghɔrcu* or *gighɔba*. The emphasis of their religious expression lies with the proper performance, the right sequence of carrying out a ritual, and the right moment of a ritual execution, rather than the promotion of a propositional ‘belief’ in divine beings. While the Batemi do enjoy listening to myths about the Bagwe, especially Ghambageu, they consider ritual performances as the primary and only effective way to order their world.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is through such ritualized activities that important moral values and ideas about gender, age structures, and proper behaviour are generated and communicated. Assuming that these rituals comprise religion among the Batemi, we can agree with Platvoet’s observation that religion in Africa is co-extensive with other aspects of social life, such as their economic and political spheres. For example, the credentials Temi elders gain as guardians of their customs makes them eminently qualified to manage the distribution of their irrigation

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the concept ‘world’ is admittedly ambiguous. World for whom? Is it the world the Batemi experience as agents? Is it the perceived world of the outside observer? Is it a unified and monolithic world perceived in the same ways by all members of society? I refer to Temi world as the world-making processes described by their *gitemi* customs which make the surrounding territory their home, and thus their world. The Temi world is a dynamic event-world with sometimes unpredictable outcomes, rather than a world of static objects, or one spread out before one’s eyes, as the term ‘world’ view suggests (Ong 1969; Goodman 1978; de Pina-Cabral 2014; Ross 2012; Jackson 2012b).



waters and to settle social conflicts. Religion is thus deeply interconnected with the distribution of power in Temi society, or the distribution of access to economic resources.

Platvoet's definition of traditional African religion – which was kept purposefully flexible (Platvoet 1999a, 34) – provides a useful framework to work with as it reflects the main elements of Temi religion. However, there are distinct attributes of Temi religion which single it out as unique and therefore at odds with typical Bantu religions. The most significant difference from other Bantu type religions is the marked absence of ancestor veneration. Ancestors are not paid tribute to as is common practice with other Bantu societies in East Africa (Wilson 1970; Wilson 2009; Beidelman 1986; Ray 1976; Mbiti 1969). Ancestors also do not normally interfere with members of society. A special post-burial fumigation ritual ensures the safe passage of the spirit of the deceased (*kiryooka*) to the realm of the dead (*kiseelo kya nse*). On the other hand, there are features in Temi religion which seem closer to some Christian beliefs than to African religions. These include the messianic figure of Ghambageu, or eschatological stories about the end of the world. Mbiti thus makes frequent references to the Sonjo and calls their religious beliefs an 'exception' and 'unique' among other East African religions (1969). As I will demonstrate in the course of my research, the comparison of Christianity and Temi religion are founded on a misleading premise that Ghambageu constitutes the centre of Temi religion. But Ghambageu can only be accounted as cultural and religious founder in a qualified manner, and his role needs to be interpreted historically.

Instead of conceptualising Temi religious expression as a transcendent religion or a system of beliefs, I propose to think of it as a moral universe that emerges through the Batemi's bodily engagement with their environment, the sacred spaces, shrines, and symbols, in the attempt to generate moral human beings (cf. Hastings, Maxwell, and Lawrie 2002, 167; Magesa 1998). This rather vague definition of religion will become clearer in the main body of the thesis when the concrete expressions of Temi rituals are being presented. Such an approach builds on the assumption that every culture embodies its religion in a unique mode and through its own idiosyncratic myths, institutions, language, and behaviour. In other words, 'religion must become culturally embodied because our humanness is the basic medium for appropriating to ourselves all reality' (Appiah 2000, 9). Religion, then, becomes most real not in an ideology that is abstracted from everyday life, but within the historical and social expressions of human

beings. The reality of Temi religion is therefore inculturated through the way the Batemi experience the whole breadth of their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly – and equally ‘operational’ at this stage – I argue that religion in the Temi context can be interpreted as a response to ultimate questions of life, the enigma of the origin of life and its reproduction. I suggest that in the occult practices of Kirimo, the Batemi address these aspects of their existence which transcend their normal here and now. It is through the repeated participation in Temi ritual practices that their identity as morally responsible beings is formed and that a coherent universe emerges. However, for the outside observers these Temi rituals were seen as obscure or ‘pagan’ and remained unworthy of further consideration. At the same time, the missionaries and other observers were ‘fed’, and eagerly accepted, stories of Ghambageu which Temi elders may have instinctively felt were presentable as their own Gospel stories, rather than with the rituals to which the Batemi assign crucial importance for the welfare of their communities.

#### **1.4 Definitions of key concepts**

Ethnographic accounts can hardly avoid staple analytical concepts such as identity, religion, ethnicity, myth and rituals, history, orality and literacy, or tradition and modernity. Some preliminary explanations about the use of key concepts is therefore in order. However, the use of these concepts should be subservient to the task of finding out how people experience and construct their own lives within their cultural context. These terms should help to approach complex social realities as heuristic, open-ended and exploratory tools in order to discover the insiders’ point of view.

The classic elements of culture were imagined as values, skills, and knowledge which are stored either in the human mind, or represented as a set of people (such as elders, or priests) who guard these traditions and communicate them from one generation to the next (Geertz 1973; Goodenough 1981; Hiebert 1997; Douglas 2003). Accordingly, people are guided by a unique repertoire of speech, behaviour, and beliefs the culture provides for them. While it is undoubtedly true that individuals are passively

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<sup>3</sup> For inculturation as a concept used in missions and theology see (Schreiter and Schillebeeckx 1985; Hillman 1993a; Wijzen 2000; Shorter 2006; Knighton 2006).

conditioned by their culture, I suggest that Temi culture is best conceived as learned dispositions by which social agents navigate their actions in strategic ways to overcome social problems and establish long-lasting relationships. These socially acquired habits are located in the individual and social body (rather than in cognitive mental scripts), and allow people to act flexibly, unreflectively, and appropriately in co-ordination with others. Culture thus manifests itself not in abstraction, but as concrete and embodied experiences and in co-ordinated action with other members of the community (cf. Bourdieu 1977; Jackson and Mitchell 1983; Jennings 1982). For the Batemi, a small-scale community that depends on mutual participation for its survival, co-ordination of economic and religious activities is crucial to the people's existence, while social division is perceived as a dangerous predicament for the community's well-being.

Furthermore, I propose that human beings make their lives meaningful by assigning significance to space and time periods. This categorization of territories and times is learned through routine observations of ceremonies (cf. James 2004). Members of society thus gradually learn to organize life experiences during their exposure to, and entanglement with society. For example, an important boundary is reached at initiation, when Temi children are transformed into adult members which drastically changes their behaviour. Once the initiation threshold is crossed, they are supposed to validate their membership through competent speech and appropriate actions (cf. Beidelman 1997a). While cultural knowledge serves as the basic organizing principle of social life, this knowledge of language, values, and history is not evenly distributed (cf. Keesing 1979). Especially in traditional African settings, knowledge about serious transformative or restorative processes of the person or the community are the domain of elders. This feature of age-privileged access to religious and historical knowledge is prominent in Temi culture and affects the way Christianity has been critically evaluated by the Batemi. Temi elders can hardly take Christianity seriously, considering that the main audiences in Christian churches are women and children. If Christian knowledge were of serious consequence for the community, why would it be placed into the care of women and young people who are considered generally ignorant of life's problems?

Only with the fairly recent arrival of churches have the Batemi started to use the term *dini* (borrowed from the Swahili word for religion which originates from the Arabic *dīn*). They use it to buttress their own traditional practices as opposed to the Christian *dini*. Rather than avoiding the concept of religion in the description – as some scholars tend to do because of a Western bias (cf. Schäfer 1999c; Beidelman 1997a; Beidelman 1986) – I apply the concept as a useful bridge because it has provided and

continues to provide a discursive framework in the encounter between the outsiders and the Batemi.<sup>4</sup> The notion of religion is therefore an operational tool which is adaptable and pragmatic as it travels across cultural boundaries and appropriates new and different meanings.

In the absence of a Temi script and any interest in doctrines of belief, Temi myths must be considered simply as narratives, stories which are shared as part of the Batemi's cultural heritage. However, this does not mean that these stories are meaningless. Cosmogonic myths about hero-gods are in widespread circulation and build an important repertoire in the construction of the Temi cosmology. Especially prominent are stories about Ghambageu, the figure who is invoked in many *ghorou* (ritual celebrations) and who established institutions such as the *etongɔ*. Myths are not standardized and preserved with canonical rigidity, but are told by elders playfully, with glee, not minding obvious inconsistencies or contradictions to previous versions. They are not told to justify specific behaviour or legitimize social hierarchy – but rather are intended to provide some entertainment and distraction from the routines and tedium of life. Temi myths and ritual do, however, interact and affirm each other punctiliously, and during the cyclical passing of seasonal celebrations unfold the meaning of *gitemi*. They express something about the enigma of their existence by means of symbols. These symbols are not consciously available to the Batemi, so that their meaning and interpretation have to be teased out.<sup>5</sup>

The term 'belief' and 'to believe' – just as concepts such as 'ritual', 'religion', and 'myth' – cannot be unequivocally be applied across cultures. Beliefs about the Batemi's visible and invisible cosmos are mostly implicit in behaviour, symbols, speech (metaphors and myths), and especially ceremonies. What the Batemi believe can hardly be gleaned from a cursory glance at their culture, and even long-term observation does not allow for easy and unambiguous conclusions. As a matter of fact, even adult

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Riesebrodt – similar to Platvoet – has argued for the indispensability of the concept of religion in academic discourse. It serves as a common denominator in the analysis of the nature of religious phenomena which, in one way or another, appear in all cultures (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Vähäkangas defines Temi myths as 'truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past' and that they have 'legitimising function, giving reasons why social realities are the way they are' (Vähäkangas 2008a, 72). Schäfer refutes such a direct implication of myths onto the social world; he believes that 'mythical stories are more than just allegories or pictures by means of which one addresses problems and their possible solutions. They are stories with a specific characteristic; that is, they create a human dependency. The stories create a bond between humans and transcendent powers, whose ability to interfere in human lives is considered real' (Schäfer 1999d, 333). The main purpose and function of Temi myths is seen in their capacity to confirm the existence of the social person which is constituted in the difference of self and the other (ibid. 336).

members of Temi society are often at a loss to explicate religious values or beliefs. There are two reasons for this stark contrast to Western type religious beliefs: First of all, the Batemi are generally more concerned with consistency of ritual action than with orthodox belief. While moral code requires commitment toward ritual participation, nobody's beliefs are ever questioned, or criticized. Secondly, much of Temi socio-religious activities (such as male initiation and *mase*) are carried out in the penumbral sphere of secrecy and with a high degree of protection which cannot be penetrated easily.

Malcolm Ruel has shown how the Christian use of 'belief' has undergone significant changes of meaning in the course of church history, and that it would be naïve to assume that belief is the central concern of all religions (Ruel 1982). While Donovan as a Catholic missionary paid attention to the notion of religion as a belief system and redefined its content in order to make it appealing to the Batemi, Protestant missionaries were more focused on belief as an activity, either as faith in Ghambageu or Jesus (Vähäkangas 2008b; Vähäkangas 2006; Vähäkangas 2008a).

The Batemi themselves do not have an equivalent that describes a belief in metaphysical concepts beings or realities, because the supernatural has only peripheral significance (cf. Ruel 1997; 237). The closest term used to express agreement, consent, and belief in the sense of acceptance of a state of affairs or an overwhelming evidence is *edekela*. But the word *edekela* emphasizes agreement, rather than an active faith or trust in something, or somebody. The opposite of *edekela* is *elēga*, which means to refuse, to deny, or to decline an offer. To refuse cooperation with others is often seen as a social offence. Another word used in association with Christian faith is the word *edinya* (to depend on, to rely on somebody, to hope for).

It should be noted, therefore, that the Batemi's religious make-up and experience is quite different from the modern Christian notion where the believer relates to God via his or her individual faith. The Batemi find themselves inserted into a religious arrangement toward religious symbols (such as the horn of Kirimo) that stir intense emotions and deeply upsetting feelings. These bodily felt reverberations in the heart (*nkɔlɔ*) of men and women when the sound of Kirimo blasts across the valley are not subject to an individual's conscious deliberation or decision of individual faith. The

sound of the horn is overpowering; it grips people, because ‘there is nothing else in the world that sounds like this.’<sup>6</sup>

## 1.5 Research methodologies used

The primary aim of this research is to document Temi culture and particularly its religious beliefs and practices as it evolves from within the Batemi’s own cultural and historical context. In order to achieve this aim, an ethnographic method has been chosen because it provided the most promising tools to capture the nature of the Temi culture. During extensive fieldwork, the research was carried out according to two key methods, participant observation, and conducting open-ended, semi-structured interviews.

The fieldwork was undertaken during my project-work as a practitioner in Bible translation with SIL International<sup>7</sup> from 1998 until 2009, with many in-depth interviews carried out after re-locating to Arusha. During that first period I lived with my family in the village of Ebwe (Digodigo in Maasai) and was relatively immersed in Temi culture. I learned and studied the language, and formed relationships with significant people in Ebwe and other villages in Butemine (the Temi area).

Participant observation was carried out in domestic and quotidian contexts, as well as during ritual occasions. The privilege of an extended time in the field allowed me to observe several cycles of the Temi ceremonial year, and thus study changes over a *longue durée*; over the period of several years I noticed how some traditional practices declined while others were revived. While my presence in everyday mundane social contexts was seldom seen as intrusive, there were indeed times, for example at the *mase* ceremony, especially during ritual activities that concerned their secret practices, when I was not allowed to be part of the events. To obtain accurate data of these secret actions I had to rely on information shared by the aforementioned group of Christian contributors. Field notes (over 1000 entries dated 1999 – present) were written down

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<sup>6</sup> Interview: AK 14 May 2012

<sup>7</sup> SIL International is an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) and a sister organization of the Wycliffe Global Alliance. Previously they were called the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators. The aim of the joint organizations is the technical and academic assistance of indigenous communities in developing their languages and translating parts or sometimes the entire Bible.

with the assistance of a software programme called FieldWorks, developed by SIL International for the collection and analysis of linguistic and cultural data.<sup>8</sup>

The second method applied was conducting open-ended and semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were men and women in Ebwe and other villages, usually at their homestead. The interviews were normally held in Gitemi and digitally recorded and transcribed. I was normally accompanied by one or two Temi contributors. Data generated through interviews were gathered in a number of different ways. First, topical interviews were used to learn more about various cultural domains: agricultural methods and seasons, domestic customs, life cycles, moral teachings and kinship rules. As part of understanding kin and clan relations among the Batemi I documented kinship charts for ten individuals.

Another type of in-depth interview was held with elders with more focused questions regarding their oral history, myths, political structure, and their annual ritual cycle. There are circa 100 interviews of this genre which were carried out in all of the Temi villages. Prior to the interview event, those elders with knowledge and the capability to narrate Temi history and myths were identified by inhabitants of the village concerned and asked to participate. Except for the taboo topic of Kirimo, other domains were addressed without hesitation.<sup>9</sup>

Then there are recordings of ‘natural discourses’, that is, verbal interactions which were recorded as they naturally occurred during the course of social encounters. These comprise traditional songs (ceremonial songs, lullabies, and praise-songs), liturgical prayers, and ritual blessings. Affiliated with this category are recordings of staged conversations, songs and prayers which the contributors imitated as truthfully as possible. These included conversations as they typically take place during bride price negotiations, age-group meetings, and elders’ meetings.

A further set of interviews (approximately five) focused on life stories. Temi men related their biographies including their initiation experience and what it meant to them. This data provides an interesting and appreciable contrast to the objectified ‘official’

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<sup>8</sup> The field notes are referenced as NB (Notebook) with the corresponding date of the observed event. The software is freely available at <http://fieldworks.sil.org/download/>.

<sup>9</sup> A common dynamic during these interviews with elders was that those with more and deeper knowledge of their culture and history would let the less experienced, younger members act as spokespersons. Gradually the chief elders would engage in the conversation, adding and correcting what had been said by others.

version of their central rite by highlighting actual incidents that differ from the idealized script.

A last set of extensive interviews was done with Temi collaborators to expand and analyse previous material, and to fill in gaps in the research. These discussions and interviews served to review and validate data, form hypotheses, and devise further research cycles.

In total there are over 400 interviews of various length and about various cultural topics. In addition, there are recordings of 85 Temi songs (traditional and church music), myths, legends, and hortatory descriptions of the local culture. Of the 400 interviews, 200 have been transcribed and translated into English. Finally, video and photographic materials were produced, including two short documentary films: *Erimya Mooki*, which explores house-building after a fire, and an overview of typical cultural activities such as beer brewing and pottery making.<sup>10</sup>

The wealth of collected material provided a holistic view of Temi culture; it opened a window into the social structures with its key institutions, as well as to the experience of individual members of this unique society. The analytical process is best described as a combination of data examination and an ongoing iterative interaction with the Batemi. In many ways the research subject, namely the meaning of *gitemi*, emerged and gained validity out of this circular process. This process of gradual discovery does not mean that all of a sudden one has the key to unlock and understand all aspects of their culture, but merely corroborates the complexity and the implicitness of much of those things which the competent member of Temi society consider as ‘things that go without saying’ (Knighton 2005, 6–7; Streck 2007). The collaboration and interaction with Batemi over half a dozen seasonal cycles (and many unforeseen events, such as famines, raids, and village conflicts) allowed my understanding of their culture to mature and grow. Naturally, at times it also forced me to revise and redirect my research. For example, in 2004 there was an armed conflict between the villages of Ebwe and Soyeta. Travel between Ebwe and other places became dangerous. At that time I did a series of interviews with men and women about the clashes and conflict resolution in general. Afterwards, other topics grew in significance.

When I tested my own hunches or hypotheses about the significance of some observed phenomena with my contributors, they sometimes disqualified my arguments

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<sup>10</sup> 2009, unpublished



as invalid because it turned out that the data was either misconstrued or simply incorrect. On the other hand, on a number of occasions these contributors commended my work as the ‘only person who can write truly about Temi culture’.

The process of generating these empirical materials developed its own dynamic momentum. What started out with the gathering of general data about the Batemi gradually circled in on specific areas such as the transformative processes taking place during male initiation, gender formation, and social hierarchy. However, this anthropological inquiry is not meant to furnish *final* answers to the Temi meaning of life or of their religion. The idea of providing final closure is also refuted by the Batemi themselves, as the performance of ceremonies such as *mase* and *mbarimbari* testify to a continued quest for answers. The ongoing practices are the tools to live an ordered moral life, organize a powerful and disciplined age-set system to cope with potential Maasai attacks and manage a labour-intensive irrigation system. But the arcane practices that effect such results must be kept opaque, and for most of the Batemi they indeed appear mysterious.

It is out of this pool of empirical data – an accumulation of cultural knowledge and extraordinary experiences of the Temi life-world – that the task remained to create a compelling ethnographic account. Because of the secrecy of the central aspects in Temi religion, great caution was required when addressing core symbols such as Kirimo or *mase*. But eventually, following leads and insights gained through observation, unfolding events, and ever more discussions and questions, the notion of *gitemi* emerged which is presented in this thesis.

## 1.6 Primary sources

This research would not have been possible without the many Temi men and women who assisted me in this endeavour to represent their culture. While some were interviewed only once or occasionally, others were regular contributors in repeated discussions and debates.

I am especially indebted to a group of Temi church affiliated men and women with whom I discussed questions concerning the life of the church in midst of a traditional people like the Batemi. I inquired, for example, how local churches respond to the often violent coercion of male initiation, female circumcision, or clan-arranged marriages. What stance should the church take toward practices that are not compatible

with its beliefs? Are there alternative practices the church could adopt to substitute initiation or sacrificial offerings? What alternative models of gender relations, family, and marriage can the church offer and how are these presented credibly? To answer such questions adequately required an in-depth grasp of the cultural system, and thus inspired myself and the Temi contributors to make further investigations. At whatever level the interviewees interacted with me, their contribution often revealed surprising aspects of their lives, insights that I could not have made independently. I do not hesitate to acknowledge that it is due to the views shared by the Batemi themselves that I was able to construct a new perspective on their lives – much more than through my individual ability to extract, collect, and surmise information about their culture.

Each Temi village has its own traditional council (*etongo*) and it is with these sets of people that I often met. Since we lived in the village of Ebwe, it was with the *benamijye* (elders, pl.) of Ebwe that I formed the closest relationship. The chief *mwenamijye* (elder, sg.) of Ebwe, Salia Ngwedua Nambololo (a.k.a. Diniase), has been the most hospitable and gregarious of them all; the acquaintance with him provided me with introductions to other elders in the village. A visit at his homestead always included the offering gifts like snuff tobacco, sugar, or rice; in return he and his wife would offer some roasted sweet potato, chai, or if available, a cup of *bughōmani* (honey beer). The village council expressed their desire to know about our travel itinerary, so that they could bless us with their prayers. Another expression of their trust is the fact that the council granted us access to their sacred water sources to implement a water project for the village. This generous gesture allowed me to investigate the otherwise inaccessible spring area and learn more about the water management and its mythology.

Another set of interviews was done with a group of men in their 60s and 70s, some of whom had enjoyed the benefit of a church-based (Roman Catholic or Lutheran) education in the 1960s and 70s, or went to a government school during the early days of Nyerere's leadership. These men had been enculturated in *gitemi*, but they had also gained some first-hand experience of foreign cultures through their encounters with colonial personnel and Christian missionaries. Although still committed to their traditions and regularly participating in local ceremonies, they had tasted and tested the social validity of such institutions as schools and churches and now critically reflected and compared them with their own customs.

In order to gain access to women's perspectives and their experiences, I was able to take advantage of my wife's investigations and the relationships she was able to establish with Temi women. My wife Christine was invited to, and participated in

activities of ‘her’ age-group, e.g. wedding celebrations, fund-raising events (*harambee*), female initiation ceremonies, and even *mase* activities. One woman, MF, was especially skilled in reciting myths that her grandmother had told her. Through the frequent encounters with close female acquaintances of my wife’s, I had opportunities to interview them as well (circa 30 records). These women eventually granted us a *bona fide* status as friends and researchers of Temi culture and consented to my interviews on distinct topics such as female initiation, sexuality, and other gender based behaviour and conflicts.

Lastly, there were the already mentioned group of Temi contributors who helped me to understand their culture.<sup>11</sup> The core of this group consisted of four men between 30 and 50 with whom I met regularly to discuss cultural questions. Over the course of my stay in Ebwe I consulted many other people, but the most constant group who shared cultural information were these four men. All of them were members of local Christian churches (Roman Catholic and Pentecostal) and had therefore distanced themselves to various degrees from *gitemi* beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, they talked freely about their own initiation experience and other significant rites of passage in their lives. Most importantly, they appreciated the opportunity to discuss contentious cultural issues (that is, contentious from a Christian perspective) such as *mase* and *gitemi*. They also showed keen interest in gaining a clearer understanding about those aspects that are otherwise the prerogatives of the *benamijye*. Because of the cultural sensitivity of some of the data they shared with me, I decided to keep their names confidential and used coded initials instead.

AK, AJ, SG and AG thus assisted me in the task of generating data through their own experience and accompanied me at times when interviewing people. Their reflections about the subject of *gitemi* as a phenomenon were sometimes hampered by the difficulty of translating their experiences into a verbal expression, or by recollecting the exact sequence of an action, or an event. But if they lacked the meaning of a word, a symbol, or a ritual, they were eager to investigate and interact with those elders who were in the know.

AG was especially valuable as a contributor because he was born into a priestly clan in Raghari. Raghari is the seat of the main Ghambageu shrine and the sacred site where every village sends a delegation of *bagħərɔu* (priestly procession) with a tribute

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<sup>11</sup> Brief profiles about these contributors and other significant informants are provided in the appendix.

to start off a major ceremony. AG had spent his youth in and around the *ghorowane* area and learned prayers, songs, and blessings by heart. He was therefore able to recite in precise manner the religious rites of the *bahageeri* (the overseeing priests at the temple hut). AG was also the most intuitive guide in the interpretive phase because he had the greatest measure of exposure to religious rituals.

## **1.7 Secondary sources**

Few ethnographic descriptions about the Batemi are available today, and of these, only two (Gray 1974; Schäfer 1999) are of substantial ethnographic quality. In the following I will outline and critique these two works. I am adding two others by Vähäkangas (2008a) and Donovan because they address the interrelation between Temi traditions and Christianity. There are other contributions, such as historical notes, myths, or descriptions of local customs, archaeology and linguistics from which I am drawing occasionally in the course of my argument (Danielson 1959; Donovan 2003; Bowen and McLaren 2011; Finch 1957; Fosbrooke 1955a; Ndula et al. 1955; B. Gray 1971; Griffiths 1940; Namjogo 1996; Adams, Potkanski, and Sutton 1994; Potkanski 1987; Potkanski and Adams 1998a; Rong'ola 1976; Siemenauer 1955; Nurse and Rottland 1991; Nurse and Rottland 1993).

### **1.7.1 Robert F. Gray: 'The Sonjo of Tanganyika'**

Robert Gray's ethnographic study of the Sonjo (Temi) is based on fieldwork during six months in 1955 (1974a). The inquiry was done under the influence of structural-functionalism which was the dominant anthropological paradigm of its time. Gray worked along traditional categories and described the kinship system, economy, religion, and political structures of Sonjo society. The ethnographic mode was one of gathering and presenting objective social facts from which one could deduce the character and identity of a people group.

Bracketing Gray's book is a hypothesis put forth by Wittfogel (1957) who had studied hydraulic societies in Asia. Wittfogel suggested that irrigation societies typically develop a despotic government through the control of water resources. Gray thus set out to test if this hypothesis is true in a small scale African group like the Sonjo whose

agriculture is also based on irrigation farming. In fact, the entire book is somewhat overshadowed by this focus on the relationship between water resources and power structures in Temi society (cf. Schäfer 1999d, 15). Gray thus precluded insights into other, more complex possibilities of power distribution and modes of political order. In the limited period he spent among the Batemi he never penetrated to the deeper levels of power, for example those powers that emanate in the Kirimo cult, the powers related to the Bagwe (gods), or the powers which are evoked during oath swearing.

Gray categorizes the Temi social system as a simple segmental type of clan organization; clans have mechanical relations with bonds of intermarriage which under normal circumstances are able to govern and control land tenure. Over time the main clan units developed sub-units, going from a segmental to a segmentary society. Because of the subsequent need of a central authority to run the water distribution, the society evolved into a hybrid social structure with an incorporated lineage system and a centralized governing body (*etngɔ*) in each village. A central government was needed because irrigation required disciplined co-operation of all the men in the village, especially for canal maintenance. Furthermore, the distribution of time slots for irrigation water needed trustworthy personnel who would not corrupt the system. This explanation about the cause for a weakened clan system and a strong centralized government is not implausible, but would need to be supported with more data to hold up.

Although Gray's work was considered a standard anthropological contribution in the 1960s (Kopytoff 1963; Huntingford 1964; Murra 1964), its usefulness to this research was limited because of the thin scope of indigenous voices. Incidentally, Gray's wife, Betty, published a more popular account about her experience of their stay among the Sonjo (1971). Her book provides a personal encounter with Sonjo society, and thus gives some interesting clues to understanding the people's lives. However, Robert Gray's book remains a valuable reference when it comes to comparing historical changes in Temi customs, rituals, and myths.

### **1.7.2 Alfred Schäfer: Unsagbare Identität – Das Andere als Grenze in der Selbstthematisierung der Batemi (Sonjo)<sup>12</sup>**

Alfred Schäfer's book (1999d) addresses the formation of the social person in Temi society. It deals with the question of how the Temi individual self is constituted through specific socialization processes, foremost of which are rites of passage rituals. Schäfer posits the concept of the 'good character' as the main reference point and the idealized model around which Temi culture is constructed. Furthermore, Schäfer maintains a focus on the underlying structures and differences, as they become visible in the social differentiation halves or opposites (e.g. in gender, clan, village, territory). Only the joining of the two halves completes the unity of the person or the community. The imagined 'good character' sets the moral standard and living up to this standard determines the well-being of the collective group. According to Schäfer, this aspect of differentiation and the Batemi's concern for complementarity permeates much of their thinking and acting. Schäfer contrasts the Temi model of the person with the autonomous concept of selfhood that has evolved since the Enlightenment and is dominant today in modern European societies.

Schäfer, who is a professor of Pedagogics and Social Studies at the University of Halle, Germany, explains how he came across the Batemi rather accidentally while on a study trip with young German students to Tanzania. He returned to visit the Batemi a few years later (1996/97) for visits that lasted several months each. Much of the rather detailed data Schäfer is using had been generously offered to him by Klaus-Peter Kiesel, a German pastor with the Lutheran Church of Tanzania who is married to a Mutemi and has had access to the group for over 25 years. The data consists of descriptions gathered through participant observation of rituals, ceremonies, and daily activities of the Batemi. Furthermore, there is a large collection of stories and myths from Kiesel.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, Schäfer presents much of the data in a way which makes the reader believe that he himself was the author of the data. Schäfer thus overwrites the original authorship of Kiesel and allows a misleading impression that the presented cultural material was generated through his own research. Actually, the only empirical data

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<sup>12</sup> Only available in German. The title translates: Unspeakable Identity – The Other as Boundary in the Self-Understanding of the Batemi (Sonjo).

<sup>13</sup> Regrettably, these stories were not audio-taped or recorded in Gitemi, but translated and written down in Swahili. While the stories retain the general plot, the exact vocabulary and the poetic expression is lost in the process of interpretation (Email correspondence with Kiesel, 11 Nov 2013).

Schäfer himself gathered was a collection of interviews with young men, members of the *batana* group (the warrior age-group) about the meaning of friendship and good character traits. The interviews were held in English with the help of local Batemi who translated the conversations from English into Gitemi and vice versa; Schäfer himself does not speak Gitemi, nor Swahili, the language of wider communication. At the end of the book a short collection of stories is appended as well as a glossary of Gitemi cultural terms. The book is especially dedicated to the Batemi, none of whom, of course, understands German!

Besides his book *‘Die Unsagbare Identität’*, Schäfer deploys Sonjo/Temi data in several other publications (Schäfer 2010; Schäfer and Thompson 2009; Schäfer 2004a; Schäfer 1999a; Schäfer 2006; Wimmer and Schäfer 1998; Pazzini, Schuller, and Wimmer 2007) in order to highlight different cultural types of constructing the person. Besides variations on the previously mentioned reflection on alternative concepts of the human self, he also makes inquiries into pedagogical rituals (e.g. formal school education vs. initiation teaching) that affect the formation of the person. However, his interpretations of the meaning of Temi behaviour are often dislodged from the local context, and the abstracted conclusions lack any warrant provided by empirical data. For instance, in an article entitled *‘Die Sprache der Hörner’* (2004b), Schäfer elaborates on the sacred horn of Kirimo and the question of why the Batemi perceive the sound of the horn and its interpretation through the mediating elder as the unquestionable divine authority.<sup>14</sup> Describing the Temi male initiation procedures and the revelation of the horn of Kirimo, Schäfer climactically sums up that, *‘nicht der Mann verfügt von nun an über das Geheimnis, sondern das Geheimnis verfügt von dem Moment seiner Mannwerdung an über ihn’*<sup>15</sup> (Pazzini, Schuller, and Wimmer 2007, 40). In my discussions with a number of Temi men about this indeed memorable and momentous encounter with the horn of Kirimo, none of them referred to the secret as having power over them. Rather, they explained, power is located in, and emanates from the *oath* the young men take when they are initiated. The oath binds the men unconditionally to keep the laws of Kirimo. According to my data, the secret of Kirimo and its origin do indeed

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<sup>14</sup> The phenomenon of past traditions as authoritative conviction without any reference to a ‘rational’ explanation has been dealt with in other places (Bloch 2004; Bloch 1977; Rappaport 1999).

<sup>15</sup> ‘From now on it is not the man who controls the secret, but from the moment of his beginning manhood, the secret controls the adult man’ (translation KD).

have a part in the lives of Temi men, but the harm they fear lies in the ancestral powers to which they have committed themselves through the solemn oath.

Apart from some unbridled and overworked post-modern interpretations, Schäfer provides useful glimpses of Temi culture and numerous myths and legends of Ghambageu.

### **1.7.3 Mika Vähäkangas: Between Ghambageu and Jesus**

Vähäkangas book (2008a) is written from a missiological point of view. In it he argues for a different way of looking at African Traditional Religions (ATR) as being more active agents instead of passive and submissive in their encounter with modernity. As an example, he explores the religion of the Batemi and their reaction to Christian evangelization over the last five decades. He concludes that the Batemi elders and guardians of their customs actively and successfully pursued a strategy to undermine the impact of Christianity among their people, and at the same time strengthen their own beliefs in Ghambageu.

Vähäkangas' research is mainly based on previous studies by American, German, and Tanzanian scholars, and short visits to the Temi area. After a brief overview of Temi society (chapter 2), further chapters are devoted to the description of their traditional religion (chapter 3), and the history of the Christian mission among the Batemi (chapter 4). In chapters 6 and 7 he elaborates on the themes that he considers the most contentious issues in the relation between the Temi/Sonjo religious traditions and Christian belief: the myths of Ghambageu and the occult practices affiliated with him. These myths explain the origin of Ghambageu and of the springs that have supplied their fields ever since.

According to Vähäkangas, the Temi elders were able to maintain their political power by transforming their religious world-view from multiple deities to a monotheistic belief, with Ghambageu becoming the dominant god. By doing so, they secured their position of authority. Vähäkangas argues that the elders use the character similarities between Ghambageu and Jesus to reduce the attraction to convert to Christianity.

Vähäkangas posits that the Batemi's religious sphere is ultimately anchored in myths surrounding the legendary character of Ghambageu, thereby brushing aside the



fact that their religious values are more naturally embodied in their religious practices, that is, in rituals and communal ceremonies like *mase* and *mbarimbari*. Thus while invoking Bourdieu's concept of 'social capital' he ignored the equally important idea of 'habitus' to explain the Sonjo social realities.

Citing the case of the Batemi, Vähäkangas acknowledges the active part that African small-scale communities can adopt in facing up to world religions. However, like other observers he underestimates the complexities of the Temi culture and religion and oversimplifies the data to serve the purpose of his arguments. Nevertheless, he has pointed out an interesting and unanswered question, namely how the Batemi have been able to resist the incursion of cultural influences such as Christianity, modern education, and state legislation. Vähäkangas thus summarizes the Lutheran mission approach and how they conceived Temi religion.

#### **1.7.4 Vincent Donovan's letters**

Of all the outside observers who reflected and wrote about Temi culture, Vincent Donovan spent the longest period among the Batemi (1968-1973). As a Catholic missionary of the Spiritan Order (Holy Ghost Fathers, C.S.Sp), he wrestled deeply with the question of how the Gospel message affects not simply individual lives, but reforms societies and cultures. As a result of his missionary engagement he wrote the book 'Christianity Rediscovered' (first edition 1978, 2003) which became a bestseller in Christian circles. This book, in which Donovan relates his missionary life among the Maasai and Sonjo of Northern Tanzania, is still highly valued among missionaries today (Kollman 2012; Bevans 2015).

While Donovan's 'Christianity Rediscovered' is commonly associated with his mission work among the Maasai, it is much less known that he actually lived for almost five years among the Batemi. A recent publication with letters to his US American home constituency provides interesting and detailed insights into his theological thinking and his encounters with the Batemi (Bowen and McLaren 2011). Being part of a group of Catholic missionaries who spearheaded new approaches to mission work in the wake of Vatican II, he was not afraid to point out the Church's past failures and to suggest new directions.

As a missionary practitioner Donovan engaged with the members of the community in an attempt to convince them to join the Catholic Church. He gradually

rejected an older mission paradigm which consisted of transferring and imposing foreign church structures and church discipline onto African peoples. Instead of building churches, hospitals, or schools, he concentrated simply on communicating the Gospel message: 'Christianity is not an institution, it is a way of life' was his motto (Bowen and McLaren 2011, 106). This strategy was seen as a stimulating new approach to Christian mission, although in practice it never delivered the desired effects (Bowen and McLaren 2011, 207–25; Bowen 2009).

Throughout his missionary career, Donovan wrestled with the traditional notion of Christianity he had grown up with. In the encounter with African communities and their traditional religions, he kept developing, refining, and simplifying the notion of Christian religion. But despite commendable efforts to inculturate and contextualise the Gospel, he subconsciously maintained a concept of religion which derived from his own cultural matrix. As I will argue in more detail later on, I suggest that it was a combination of a subliminal preference of a Western type religion on the one hand, and a prejudice towards local customs on the other, which ultimately made his mission efforts ineffective.

## **1.8 Theoretical considerations and reflexivity**

In this research I suggest that Temi society and religion are best understood with a focus on ceremonial practices through which the Temi cosmos and their social institutions are brought about. An examination of how gestures, words, body movements, and physical markings of time and space construe Temi morality are more promising than the single pursuit of the question of their beliefs or abstracted values. The result of these processes is an ethos which is called *gitemi*, the moral law by which the Batemi live.

The Batemi see rituals not as trite repetitive actions, but activities with strategic purposes for desired impacts. For example, the *benamijye* who orchestrate and oversee rituals are more than placeholders of political offices; the choice of ritual action, the time of preparing and executing ceremonies, and the selection of assistants are critical factors to the ritual success and are done with great deliberation. Catherine Bell succinctly sums up the dynamics of ritual practices in the following way:

Ritualized action construes its situation for the advantages of promoting images and relationships in which there is overt deference to the authority of otherworldly sources of

power as well as of those of human beings believed to speak for these powers (Segal 2006, 405).

*Gitemi*, although ubiquitously present in social behaviour (social etiquettes such as greetings, respecting elders, honouring women), truly springs forth from the activities and teachings of male initiation. That is the time and place where men learn through bodily engagement the meaning of submission to the elders, or keeping a secret, of complete loyalty, and of overcoming adversity. Initiation is the locus that establishes a man's identity, but also a sense of order that continues structuring structures (Bourdieu and Giddens) through this male habitus.<sup>16</sup>

*Gitemi* does not occur as isolated actions, but is understood as the customs which have been handed down by the previous generation. This sense of continuity gives *gitemi* a historical dimension in which customs undergo changes which are not always perceived by the members of society. The elders only refer to the previous generation as the crucial moment when *gitemi* was handed down to them, or rather, how they 'found' *gitemi*, rather than to the time of origin.<sup>17</sup>

However, *gitemi* should not be seen as a tradition which has always existed and will be carried on forever, as a matter of principle (although many Batemi insist on this fact). *Gitemi* is dynamic and needs to be constantly produced and re-produced through ritual practice, the initiation of new generations, and the observance of its customary laws. But of course *gitemi* has had a beginning (over which one can only speculate), and its future is rendered precarious as practices such as the *mase* have come under pressure from within Temi society and from the Tanzanian government.

The main purpose of this research is a presentation of ethnographic data to explain what constitutes the nature of *gitemi* (Temi customs), the formation of the Temi person, and the Temi cosmos as a whole. *Gitemi* not only comprises their ethnic identity, but also their religious traditions, and as such marks a remarkable contrast to the portraits of Temi culture and religion as drawn by other observers. The arguments are illustrative examples of how the Batemi deploy material objects, symbols, and symbolic behaviour to construct gendered human beings and an ordered collective body. The evidence upon

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<sup>16</sup> Schäfer uses the concept of the 'good character' (*monto ale nsoni*) as the focal point of his interpretation of Temi culture. The 'good character' is the matrix where social and moral order originates and where social values are reflected (1999c, 51 ff.).

<sup>17</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) made a clear distinction between tradition (based on and fixed by written records and therefore inflexible), and custom (oral and pragmatic). Such a sharp distinction is not maintained in this research, as the typology literate/tradition and oral/custom is not warranted or relevant in Temi culture.

which the argument is built lies in the spectrum of empirical material presented, descriptions of Temi ceremonial practices, and the Batemi's interpretations of these practices as recorded in interviews and discussions.

The main chapters (6-8) focus on seasonal celebrations and life-cycle rituals. Each ceremony characterizes and marks a different season. These seasons are marked by specific rituals, and the changes take effect in the people's consciousness and their moral behaviour. Without this consideration of exactly when in the annual cycle specific events take place, i.e. the temporal situatedness of the actor, it is difficult, if not impossible to understand *gitemi* at all. It is also from this embeddedness in Temi time that other aspects gain disclosure and start to make sense: the maturing seasons of individual and collective (e.g. age-groups) life, the history of the Batemi as a group, and finally the universal time.<sup>18</sup>

Batemi's official and 'objectified' projections of a ceremony were usually pretty trite and unexciting, quite contrary to the dynamic of the actual events. In order to recast a more rounded picture of their reality, I synergize objective claims the Batemi made about *gitemi* with data about their subjective experience. Without such an 'epistemological rupture' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 251), that is, the bracketing off of what is offered as common-sense opinions (e.g. the proper way to behave, believe, and speak), one would end up with objective structures and rules which are a far cry from the realism of their world. For example, the Batemi typically define *gitemi* as the way to relate and honour each other, the proper way to marry, and the proper way to respect the elders. But they do not mention that *gitemi* also includes the use of deception, violence, strategic scheming, cursing, and magic practices. My collected data suggest that there are dimensions behind the official version of *gitemi* that are at times in conflict with the approved version. Since the *benamijye* possess the greatest symbolic capital in this power struggle, it falls under their responsibility to set things right. But they are not the only social body with access to power, or symbols of power. As a consequence of this asymmetric distribution of power, the elders need to carefully evaluate the effects an exercise of their powers (e.g. *ebeeka muuma*, to oath, curse someone) will have on others, and what the possible repercussions could be.

As a researcher, I was neither the impartial observer who was just 'looking over their shoulders' (Geertz 1973), nor was I a complete insider implicated in their daily

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<sup>18</sup> (Gell 1992; Elias 1993; Bourdieu 1992, 98–111)

affairs, conflicts, economy, or subject to their moral codes. Engagement with Temi men, women and youths took place during different occasions and under different circumstances. Although as an outsider one can never completely merge and disappear into the local culture, the working contexts never felt uncomfortable or conspicuous. In addition to the above mentioned objective and subjective cultural accounts it was the constant interaction with neighbours and participant observation of their actions which generated a holism of Temi culture. While I cannot claim a standpoint of epistemological privilege, the data obtained under the above mentioned qualifications and with the necessary reflexive considerations, allowed me to reconstruct the presented account of the Batemi. However, a good representation of the Temi world must allow for different epistemes; *gitemi* is comprised by many voices, discourses, and behaviours and I want to avoid the false impression that their universe produces the same uniform cultural expression. It is more accurate to say that there are diverse, sometimes conflicting and contradicting, representations and claims of *gitemi*. It is therefore my desire that the various attitudes towards the same event are not drowned into a single mono-logic interpretation (Kratz 2010, 33; Clark and Holquist 1986).

The task will be to show on the one hand how *gitemi* finds expressions in the Batemi's practices, discourses, and beliefs, but also to reveal how it occurs across cultural domains and social events. Some of these events may be peripheral, ephemeral, and elusive. Nevertheless, they contain moments that display elements of contestation and contradiction as to how to handle a social conflict, or how to proceed with a certain task properly. *Gitemi* is thus constantly being negotiated, shaped, and reshaped within a complex conundrum, and as such represents a battle of multiple interpretations.

### **1.8.1 Gitemi as language**

Besides *gitemi* as cultural practice (italicised and using the Temi vowel system), there is Gitemi, their language. A people's language must never be conceived apart from its cultural and historical context in which it occurs (Duranti 1997; Sapir 1921; also Heidegger 1982). It is an essential dimension of Temi culture, rather than a separate tool which the Batemi use to communicate or bring order into the world. The Batemi are well able to think abstract thoughts, or imagine complex kinship relationships. But when it comes to language, words make sense if uttered at the right moment and the right context. Words belong to a situation. This pragmatic sense for language, that is,

language as part of the habitual behaviour which underpins the symbolic system of the Temi world, is significant. When I, for example, collected Gitemi sayings, it was rather difficult to solicit idioms or proverbial sayings from people. Especially for older men and women it was difficult to think of Temi proverbs without a specific occasion that triggered them. Normally, only particular social constellations, images, or types of human behaviour give rise to these sayings. Besides its capacity to establish rapport with fellow Batemi, express one's intentions, desires, and feeling, the Gitemi language carries weight when issued in promises, prayers, curses, and judgments. Meaning is implicit in the use of words that is, meaning grows out of cultural practice (Wittgenstein and Anscombe 1958).

There are other reasons why Gitemi must not be considered as an autonomous medium of communication in isolation of its cultural context.<sup>19</sup> Language carries the weight of cultural baggage: it functions as a transmitter of culture. As Edward Sapir pointed out,

It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group ... see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (quoted in Douglas 2003, 22–23).

Besides the learning and maturing in linguistic competency, that is, the proper grammatical use of Gitemi, a Mutemi also learns about censorship and sanctions of discourse, i.e. to know what can be said and what cannot. Linguistic exchanges are more than neutral transfers of information,

Linguistic relations are always relations of power (*rappports de force*) and, consequently, cannot be elucidated within the compass of linguistic analysis alone. Even the simplest linguistic exchange brings into play a complex and ramifying web of historical power relations between the speaker, endowed with a specific social authority, and an audience, which recognizes this authority to varying degrees, as well as between the groups to which they respectively belong (Jenkins 2003, 154).

For example, a father's relationship to his non-initiated son can be strained and tense because of the sanction placed on adult men not to broach the topic of Kirimo. A

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<sup>19</sup> Gadamer has insistently argued that words are not mere 'signs' or 'tools' for communication. Language discloses the world we live in. Man is not master of language, but finds himself already in a web of language. For Gadamer, 'language is not just a fixture which man finds in his world: rather, in and through it comes the possibility of having a world at all' (in Palmer 1969, 206).

*kijɔɔri* (uninitiated boy) who, nevertheless, dares to ask his father about Kirimo, is severely rebuked if not beaten up. On the other hand, children experience more freedom to speak and ask questions when spending time with the maternal relatives (*ndogo*). In Temi society, elaborate and restricted codes are thus not mutually exclusive categories, but they are used according to social contexts.

People engaging in social relations through the use of language thus enter into a ‘linguistic market place’ where utterances are weighed for what they are worth. Speech and discourse are powerful interventions on the world in that they can structure and restructure society. Not everyone has the authority to classify, judge, or make other important choices.

Appropriating such a view of language, there are several questions that emerged in the course of my research. Who are the significant people whose voice is shaping *gitemi*, i.e. their traditions? Do people in subordinate roles (e.g. women, children, or the Baturi clan) get a hearing in Temi culture? What is the nature and significance of the language of Kirimo? Is it perceived as the amplified voice of the *benamijye* or its own independent voice?

Besides the already mentioned proverbs, the repertoire of Temi oral literature comprises riddles (*syeeni*), poetry and songs (*maghuuji*), prayers (*eheela*), and myths or narratives of the past (*ngano*). Social experience and how the Batemi imagine their relationship with each other is expressed through linguistic means. Some of these key metaphors and symbols, such as the leather cape which stands for the unity of the group, or the horn of Kirimo which signifies male superiority will be discussed in detail.

### **1.8.2 Anthropological theories**

The research is drawing inspiration from social scientific theories and anthropological approaches to the study of culture. Three of the most helpful anthropological scholars and theoreticians for this study are Pierre Bourdieu, Victor Turner, and Thomas Beidelman. I briefly summarize and critique their contribution to the study of culture.

### 1.8.2.1 Pierre Bourdieu's habitus

Bourdieu argues persuasively that neither a rational theory which builds on the idea that individuals are guided by utilitarian principles, nor objectivist theories (e.g. structuralism and functionalism) do justice to a representation of social reality. According to Bourdieu, social ideology is the result of a vast range of seemingly inconsequential activities in quotidian and ritual contexts that should be studied in its inscription as the habitus of individual human beings. Habitus is the human capacity to navigate through a multitude of different social situations and generate the appropriate behaviour with ease, without conscious recourse to a social rule. These deep-rooted schemes of the habitus, which store the knowledge of how to behave competently, are flexibly applied across different cultural domains.

It is out of the total sum of the experiences of the habitus that people perceive the meaning of their social existence, a sense of reality. This pre-reflected perception of the reality of the world they live in is assumed to be the same for everyone and exists therefore without need to be mentioned or questioned. Hidden in this muted language of the *doxa*, i.e. the cultural ideology, are the deeper premises and cultural structures which form the foundation upon which people interpret their existence (cf. Bourdieu 1992, 30–41). For the Batemi these structures consist in gender opposition, generation hierarchies, and such binaries as home vs. wilderness, dry vs. fluid, and immature vs. ripe. Through the gradual accumulation of habitus gained through experiences in domains across the cultural range, an individual Mutemi is able to construe a coherent idea of his culture; that is, he has grown a sense for the social reality in which he/she moves.

A social sense, or a sense for the game (*illusio*), is only granted to those who participate in the social world, but not to the outside observer. Practical logic is structured differently than theoretical logic; practical logic is the implicit knowledge according to which a person behaves within the familiar world, namely with spontaneity. The flow of a person's action, including the actor's intention, motivation, desire, emotions, etc. are largely pre-reflective, occur unconsciously and with ease. Reflection and objectivation happen *post festum* when an event is reconstructed by an interviewed person or by the researcher in the course of writing.

If a people's traditions thus consist of these enduring behavioural patterns, unconscious traces of the history of a group are inscribed – on the body of individuals and the collective body – and can be decoded through the individuals' intentions and perceptions of the world. In this perception as the carrier of historical traces, habitus can



be read either as the creative instrument that generates change, or it is seen as constraining behaviour by bringing it into compliance with previously learned patterns. It is the human body as the central axis where the habitus is inscribed through postures, gestures, mimics, or linguistic exclamations, and it is from these symbolic expressions that historical traces are read. For example, the Batemi mark their bodies at different stages of the enculturation process; besides circumcision for males and excision for females, there are a number of other body mutilation practices, for some of which the original meaning has been forgotten. Still, these markings tell the story of a previous behavioural pattern which differed from today's and therefore allow for, at least in part, a reconstruction of their past.

A last point on which Bourdieu was helpful in my interpretation of Temi data was his notion of time, or the 'work of time' as he called it (Bourdieu 1992, 98–111). Anthropological concepts like gift exchange or rituals gain additional meaning if they are considered from the emic perspective including the time dimension. Gift exchanges are not just 'cycles of reciprocity' in which goods are mechanically exchanged; the timing of an exchange includes the strategic choice of the 'right' moment to return a gift. In Temi society, the contribution of goats toward the bride price of a relative or a friend is mentally carefully noted so that it can be asked in return when one's own son gets married. But to demand one's contribution back after a short period and without good reason would be considered shameful. The insertion of the time aspect becomes indispensable in the analysis of the Temi seasonal cycle; the *mase* season puts severe moral constraints on the Temi men, restricting their behaviour and speech. Without consideration for the time in the annual cycle in which the discussed events occur, it would be difficult to understand what is going on.

However, despite the many uses of Bourdieu's theoretical tools, he must be criticized for curtailing the agent's freedom of reason, choice, and reflection (Jenkins 2003; Lutz in *Handbuch Der Kulturwissenschaften* 2004, 266–76). His theory of practical logic also lacks multi-vocality, as it does not allow for contradictions or paradoxes, all of which characterize any given society (Kratz 2010, 30–34). Furthermore, the concept of habitus has a tendency to become a tautological pseudo-explanation for its own origin. Finally, Bourdieu's programme does not address or explain cultural change.

### 1.8.2.2 Victor Turner's social drama

Turner understood symbols as 'the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behaviour; it is the ultimate unit of specific structures in a ritual context' (1970, 19). Symbols occur not in isolation, but in clusters, and it is in association with this emerging system that an analysis has to take place. Turner distinguished three dimensions in the study of symbols; an exegetic (the explanation provided by the member of the society), an operational (the symbol in its original context as the symbolic action is performed), and a positional (how one symbol relates to others, in contrast or in analogical relation) (1973, 1103).

Furthermore, symbols are multi-vocal with a cognitive and a sensory pole. At one pole, a symbol emits moral or ideological meaning; on the other, it evokes desires and feelings. With the Batemi, for example, the ritual application of goat fat on a person conveys a blessing which involves the person's sensory system, but it is also associated with a moral imagination of what a blessing does to a person. In a different context, goat fat (*nsunya*) is used as a magic application to bring about a desired transformation of behaviour in another person. The same material object used as a symbol has therefore a number of different meanings depending on the context.

Turner's key metaphor with which he describes rituals is 'social drama'. A social drama consists of a conflict situation, a breach which can be any transgression of the social rule, or the deliberate non-fulfilment of a regulation; a consequently mounting crisis; a redressive action; and finally, the reintegration of the fractured group into the community. Turner focused especially on the liminal phase of the ritual drama where the participants eventually form a 'communitas', a spontaneous sacred bond of equals (1975, 37–57).

Turner thus depicted society as a cathartic social drama in which ongoing conflicts and appeasing processes follow each other and eventually produce a social equilibrium until the next conflict erupts. His insistence that the social world is a world in 'becoming', and not a static being, an organism of constant dynamic change, and not a fixed entity, is echoed in the Temi metaphor of *etuma ngobi* (to sew together a leather cape). The metaphor likens the ritual process of integrating young men into the community through the initiation rite, with the sewing of individual leather patches into a single cape. Each patch of leather signifies either the individual initiate, or the age-set that is added to the community of adult men.

Like Bourdieu, Turner's is a synchronic analysis of culture, thereby marginalising historical changes in societies. Moreover, his analytical lens kept focusing on the local culture, and consequently excluding the larger global world and its implications for the local society (cf. Kratz 2010, 24–25).

In addition to Turner's insights, I found further valuable help in the discovery of symbols from Sherry Ortner's seminal article 'On Key Symbols' (Ortner 1973). Ortner established two methodological approaches to the study of symbols; one type of symbols she called 'summarizing symbols', the other 'elaborating symbols'. Summarizing symbols she defines as 'those symbols which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the (cultural) system means to them' (Ortner 1973, 1339). Examples for summarizing symbols are the flag, or the cross. In Temi culture the analogue examples are the sound of the horn of Kirimo, or the *muringaringa* (*Cordia Africana*) tree which stands for the authority of the *benamijye* elders.

Elaborating symbols, on the other hand, 'provide vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action' (ibid., 1340). Among the elaborating symbols, there is a further distinction between those symbols which elaborate conceptually (also called root metaphors), that is, they order the world into categories and thus provide orientation. Secondly, there are symbols which unfold their power through action, preconfigured strategies for social action. A good example for a cognitive symbol or a root metaphor, is *cattle* for the Dinka as it is described by Godfrey Lienhardt (1987). What cows do for the Dinka, namely provide the people with a set of analogue categories to order their surrounding world, goats are for the Batemi.<sup>20</sup> An example for the *scenario* type of symbols would for the Batemi be the *ghorou* (ritual ceremony). The concept of *ghorou* outlines the sequences and necessary actions to be taken in order to successfully perform a Temi celebration.

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<sup>20</sup> Goats are used as bride price, sacrificial offerings, and payment; goat skins are cured and used for capes, storage bags, etc. The grease is used cosmetically, but also in magical practices. Children spend much time herding the goats and old people are fond of keeping them in their hut. By 'reading' the intestines of a slaughtered goat, elders practice divination, and in Temi mythology, it is by interpreting the goats' behaviour that things are made known.

### **1.8.2.3 Beidelman's configuration of experience**

In two volumes T.O. Beidelman (1986; 1997a) presents the result of over three decades of anthropological engagement with the Kaguru of central Tanzania. Beidelman's is a rich description of Kaguru life, a balanced synthesis of their geographical situation, their history, their traditions and moral imaginations – and how it all blends together to produce the Kaguru person.

In the first volume, *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought*, Beidelman focuses on how Kaguru cosmology emerges as a result of 'the disparate and myriad shards of experience' (1986, 4) made in ritual and quotidian contexts. These experiences are collected through observation of others, participation in everyday life, listening to stories and fables, all of which are part of the bewildering complexity of social life. Beidelman thus suggests that the sum total of a person's cultural exposure, the 'configuration of experience', includes not only learning about the moral and institutional rules of a society, but also the experience of how to relate to these social rules, how to subvert them, how to read other's behaviour and their intentions. These human experiences cannot be contained in neat categories, they overflow, create new ways of handling the same or similar problems, and produce a constant surplus of imagined possibilities for action.

Beidelman's analysis of the Kaguru draws from a variety of sources including his own field notes, interviews, historical documentation, sayings and oral history to render a holistic picture of the people. His detailed account of the Kaguru world is another testimony how similar and yet diverse the cultures of East African groups are in their pursuit of what it means to be human.

## **1.9 Significance of the research**

The Batemi may be a small, geographically isolated group with distinct religious traits, but they nevertheless share some cultural characteristics with their Bantu and Nilotic neighbours, such as an age-grade system, gender-related behaviour, and an outlook on life that is strongly dependent on the traditions of the past. Temi religion is, like other religious systems, subject to inside and outside influences that change beliefs and practices over time. It is sufficiently documented that religious systems and ideas have moved across political, economic, and ethnic boundaries in the pre-colonial past

(Werbner 1977, IX–XXXVIII; Ranger in Kimambo and Temu 1969, 161–88; Ranger 1973). We find therefore influences of Nilotic cultures (Ghambageu from Datooga, Kirimo from Maasai) that marked the Temi religious system. In this section I want to show how this research relates to the wider body of knowledge about traditional East African religious systems, and in what way knowledge of this marginalized group can contribute to an overall understanding of African religion.

There is a range of ethnographies about East African groups which address the topic of identity, ethnicity, gender, and cultural reproduction (Jacobson-Widding 1983; Jacobson-Widding 1990; Jacobson-Widding 1991; H. L. Moore 1996; S. F. Moore 1977; S. F. Moore 1986; Hodgson 2005a; Hodgson 2011; Beidelman 1986; Beidelman 1997; Heald 1998; Heald 2002; Kratz 2010; Kaare 1996; Knighton 2005; Spencer 2015; Wijzen and Tanner 2000; Wijzen and Tanner 2002; Tanner 1967; Sanders 2008; Snyder 2005; Kenyatta 1962; Feierman 1990; Parkin 2006; Shetler 2007). While there are vast differences in the mode of economic production between pastoralist, agriculture, and hunter-gatherer societies, their cultural reproduction is at times a variation of the same theme. With the use of different symbols, behaviour, language, and set in different environments, the desire to instil certain values in the next generation remains a core aspect of these cultures, and these transmitted values are often of religious nature and expressed through religious rites.

One of the cultural themes that is shared by all these societies is the one of growing children into adults, and the symbolic form this transition takes. Such initiation ceremonies contain social and religious dimensions; they address social status and social relationships, as well as the relationship to transcendent beings. Participation and performance of initiation rituals produces indigenous knowledge which anchors individuals in the community. Comparative examples of ethnographic works on African initiation rituals are found in Kratz (2010) about the Ogiek in Kenya, Beidelman (1986; 1997a) about the Kaguru in Tanzania, Heald (1998) about the Bagisu in Uganda, and Ruel (1997) about the Kuria of Tanzania and Kenya. In comparison with Temi culture, there are not only differences in geographic environment and demographic scales, but also in the mode in which initiation is performed and the personal demeanour that these rites effect. For example, the Temi novices who have undergone their initiation are proud of their achievement, but they are struck dumb, not being allowed to share their excitement with others because of the secretive mode of their initiation. This is quite in contrast to the Kaguru novices who confirm their new state of manhood by revealing the songs they had learned during the initiation process (Beidelman 1997a, 148–62), or

the Gisu men who learned how to control their anger (Heald 1998, 72 ff.). This introverted and cautious characteristic is typical of Temi attitudes in other areas of their culture; for example toward sexuality, religious and political affairs, and the management of social institutions. It is also recognizable in the manner in which they dislike sharing about their lives to outside observers. It can be said that the configuration of their initiation experience determines their cultural character by which a people group is known to others (Heald 1998, 18–32).

These mentioned ethnographies do not always link up ritual practices with religious meanings (cf. Beidelman on Kaguru, Heald on Gisu). But even where religion is not the observer's central focus, there are always connotations to transcendent beings or forces (divinities, spirits, or ancestors) that are part of the cosmology of a people. The questions may not be, 'What is the nature of a people's religion? How does religious practice affect the formation of the person? How does their religion affect their social order and other aspects of their daily lives?' Nevertheless, ritual practices and beliefs of other groups essentially try to answer similar questions. They, like the Batemi, also attempt to come to terms with the puzzling task of bringing order to chaos in their individual and communal lives, as well as to the wider cosmos. They are faced with the ongoing predicament of the passing of time and the rising of new generations which have to be 'straightened' (Kuria), or 'hardened' (Gisu), or 'ripened' (Temi). The formation of a people's self-understanding must of course not be reduced to a single event, as they also encompass long-term development in the lives of individuals, as well as the long-term history of a group. Speaking of different cultural identities is thus better referred to as 'becoming' instead of 'being', because it involves historical processes, the vagaries of individuals and the unpredictability of their destiny (cf. Spear and Waller 1993).

Monica Wilson identified the four elements of African traditional religion as "the cult of the shades, the belief in God, the manipulation of medicines, and the fear of witchcraft" (1971, 26).<sup>21</sup> Today such a categorization is less rigorously used, but if applied to the Batemi, this definition finds little common ground. The Batemi, compared to other Bantu groups, have exceptionally little interference from ancestors, and witchcraft is not part of their world either. Even the idea of a belief in God is not as such very prominent, as they invoke numerous divinities in the course of a ritual

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Walls (2002, 123 ff.) identifies the components of African traditional religion in a similar way as: God, divinities, ancestors, and objects of power.

performance. The use and manipulation of medicine, on the other hand, is known to the Batemi as *bitana*, a magical substance which is dispensed by the priests to remedy physical and relational problems. Instead of restricting African traditional religions to fit a pre-defined template, we should emphasize the diversity of their expressions, such as is found in Temi religion.

A second point of significance of this study concerns the mission history of the Church in Butemine. The history of European Christian mission in Africa is well documented and research about Christianity in Africa has shifted its focus to the manner in which African Christians practise their faith and how they interpret the Bible within their cultural context (Spear and Kimambo 1999; Hastings, Maxwell, and Lawrie 2002; Comaroff 1985; Landau 1995; Dilger 2007; Green 2003; Dube and West 2000; Meyer 1999; Engelke 2007). However, we do not have much understanding of the reasons why in some cases Christian mission efforts failed despite sustained long-term endeavours.<sup>22</sup>

This research deals with such a hard case of a people group that essentially resisted subjugation to Christianity and refused relinquishment of their own religious traditions. As the entry point, the research takes the outsiders' perception of Temi culture and religion and develops a fresh understanding of their world based on new insights shared through long-time relationships with Temi contributors.

## **1.10 Organization of thesis**

In this first chapter I presented the research topic and its context, the research questions, and the methodology which underpins this research. I also show how the research topic and findings relate to the wider body of knowledge, i.e. the production of local knowledge and beliefs in East African societies. In Chapter Two the focus lies on previous representations of Temi culture by outside observers and a critique of their

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<sup>22</sup> Notable examples on the failure of Christianity to impact African societies are expounded by Richard Waller (in Spear and Kimambo 1999, 83–126) and Dorothy Hodgson (2005). Waller attributes the limited Christian impact in Maasailand to 'more complex discrepancies and contradictions between the social and economic aspirations of the converts and the position they actually occupied, and between these aspirations and the values and concerns of the missions, of the larger Maasai community and of the colonial administration' (Spear and Kimambo 1999, 84), rather than to an general incompatibility of Christianity and pastoralism. Hodgson argues that the reason for the failure of the Catholic missionizing efforts around Monduli in Tanzania lay in the missionaries' focus to convert Maasai men, rather than incorporating the women and their female spirituality.

methodological approaches. Chapter Three introduces the ecological and geographical context and Chapter Four deals with Temi history.

The main body of the thesis (Chapters Five to Eight) is a presentation of my description of Temi religious traditions. In Chapter Five I examine the council of elders (*etɔngɔ*) as the pivotal institution of Temi customs. Chapter Six looks at the ceremonial calendar which orders the Temi year into seasons with ceremonies that usher in a change in moral standards. In Chapter Seven *mase* is described as the ritual celebration that culminates the Temi year with the ‘homecoming’ of Kirimo, the divinity that signifies male power and the complementarity of gender simultaneously. Alliterative with *mase* is the male initiation rite, a carefully orchestrated process which transforms immature youths into fully grown adults. Chapter Eight addresses the different stages and the principle symbols of *mase*. Chapter Nine concludes the thesis with a summary of the findings and some suggested lessons that can be learned from this research.

The appendix comprises a glossary of Gitemi words, short biographical sketches of primary contributors, and Temi myths, as well as individual initiation accounts and field notes.





## Chapter 2

### 2. GEOGRAPHY, ECONOMY, AND DEMOGRAPHY

#### 2.1 Introduction

According to Benedict Anderson, ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’ (in Beidelman 1997a, 30). This ‘style in which they are imagined’ includes the basic building blocks of a people’s identity, such as their behaviour, language, and beliefs. To this I add the Temi *landscape* and their *history* as vital elements which have influenced – and continue to exercise influence on how the Batemi view themselves, and how they are seen by others.<sup>1</sup> To study how the Batemi interact with their landscape, and with their recent and distant past, means to acknowledge the significant role space and time play in the make-up of their world.

The sources of Temi group identification are – consciously or unconsciously – much vaster than monolithic cultural scripts which people recall and verbalise. Talking of the Kaguru cosmology, Beidelman speaks of a ‘configuration of experience’ and how people ‘construct scenarios of social life from a complex mosaic of experience’ (1986, 9). The construction of identity resembles a heuristic process described by Gestalt theorists whereby the act of perception is made up of a field with centre and margin. As Wolfgang Iser explains,

A field arises out of the relationships between data – relationships that are neither given nor brought about by a stimulus but are the result of a grouping activity guided by the perceiver’s underlying assumptions. This makes all perception into a projective act of seeing, which in turn produces a gestalt (Iser 2005, 43).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Identity formation is always a reciprocal process and not just the activity of an individual subject (Jenkins 2014; Jenkins 2008; Nagel 1994; Jacobson-Widding 1983; Honko 1995; Chandra 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Iser further makes the important qualification that ‘the gestalt is neither a property of the data nor an arbitrary product of the perceiver’s imagination; instead, it designates our relationship to the world’ (Iser 2005, 44).

The Batemi thus construe their identity out of a multitude of assumptions about the reality in which they live and act. Contrary to Appadurai who perceives ethnic identities on a global perspective as being no longer tied to specific territories, but in ‘transnational flows’ (1996, 48–65), the Batemi are still embedded in a distinct landscape from which they draw a meaningful existence.<sup>3</sup> The Batemi see the land, the shrines and the secluded areas near the water springs as the sites where their history is inscribed. Through their engagement with the environment, they keep their history alive.

Although this section about the Batemi’s history and their landscape precedes the main body of the thesis, it is an elementary factor that shapes Temi culture.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Robert Gray who orders his book about the Sonjo in chapters dealing with ‘Family and Marriage’, ‘Economy’, ‘Religion’ or ‘Political Organization’, and only deals briefly with the ‘historical traditions’ of the Sonjo (1974a), I consider the way their special arrangements of the land they inhabit, and the history in which they are embedded, as integral to this study. Neglecting how their traditional practices and beliefs have evolved historically through assimilation with, and borrowing from, other people groups and the specific ecology of a place gives the misleading impression of a static culture. Even if – in the absence of written accounts of the Batemi’s past – there is some guesswork involved about the origin of their religious practices such as the Kirimo cult and the *ghorowane* temple practices, or social institutions like the *etongo* and the *singirya* age-set system, it is the notion that all cultural practices have evolved from a past that is important here. Keeping in mind the relative fluidity of these institutions will open up our imagination to new possibilities of how cultural change can take place.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter I will outline the geographical area of Butemine, the most significant spatial arrangements exemplified by the village of Ebwe, and summarize Temi social history with a discussion of how these aspects co-shaped the Batemi.

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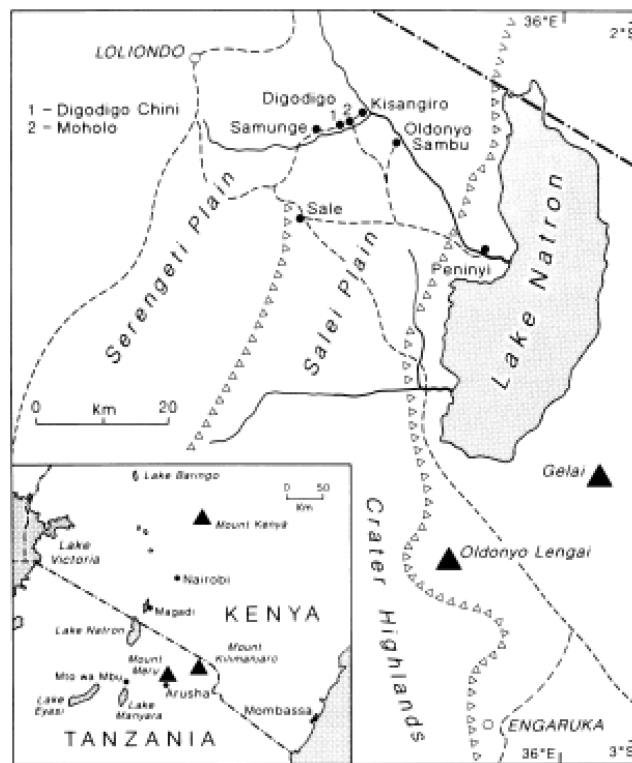
<sup>3</sup> Shetler describes how the practices of some Mara groups only live in the memory of the elders since they had been denied access to their sacred sites which now lie within the boundaries of the Serengeti National Park. When they were able to visit these sites, some elders were moved to tears (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Beidelman considers Kaguru perceptions of space and time integral to an understanding of Kaguru culture. He covers these dimensions extensively in his ethnographic description (1997a).

<sup>5</sup> See also (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Foucault 1982; Bloch 1986; Shetler 2007; Spear and Kimambo 1999; Spear and Waller 1993). Edmund Leach strongly argues against the traditional way of peeling off colonial layers and influences in ethnographic writing in order to reach the pure picture of the culture under scrutiny; the idea that any society is caught in timelessness and a cycle of eternal repetition is simply false and a matter of impossibility. Every society is subjected to change and often rapid change, even if this is not reported through writing, or if the members of that society are not aware of social change (in Beidelman 2007).

## 2.2 Geography

The Temi territory is situated between the Serengeti high plateau to the West, the Loita hills to the North, the Rift escarpment and Lake Natron to the East and another southbound Rift escarpment to the South. In geometric terms the land lies between 2°05' - 2°15'S Latitude and 35°40' - 35°52'E Longitude. The elevation ranges from 800 metres above sea level (at the shores of Lake Natron which formerly belonged to Butemine) to around 2000 metres in the hilly plateaus of Mageri and Tinaga. The main valley with the three villages of Soyeta, Ebwe and Raghari has an average elevation of 1200 to 1400 metres. The estimated total area is 600 square kilometres.



Map 2.1 The Butemine area (Adams, Potkanski & Sutton 1994)

The land of the Batemi can be accessed by unpaved dirt roads from Arusha either via the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and the Serengeti plains, or via the shorter route along the Rift Valley escarpment passing the impressive Oldonyo Lengai (the shared sacred mountain of the Maasai *and* the Batemi) and then climbing the steep escarpment into the hilly and often verdant area of the Batemi. Each entry point presents a different view of the landscape. For example, after having crossed through the dry and rocky area around Engaresero and Lake Natron with its volcanic soil, ascending into the green

shrubby hill-plateau of Butemine is a delightful experience. On the other hand, descending from the highland plateau of the Serengeti with its infinite horizon and, during rainy season teeming wildlife, and then dropping 600 metres into the main Temi valley can be a bit of a let-down at first. The inhabitants of the highland towns of Loliondo and Wasso call the land of the Batemi condescendingly ‘*shimoni*’ (Swahili: ‘down in the hole’) partly because of the warmer climate but also because of the prevalence of malaria there.

The national border which divides Kenya and Tanzania lies less than 20 kilometres from the main Temi valley, with trading across the border as a common activity for both Tanzanians and Kenyans. There are weekly markets for goods and cattle on the Kenyan side in Shompole that allow Batemi easy access via Lake Magadi and to the metropolis of Nairobi. Conversely, Kenyan businessmen from Narok offer their goods (mainly household utensils, second-hand clothing, and tools) at the market in Ebwe, attracting customers from all Temi villages. Although there is an immigration post at Loliondo where travellers are supposed to check in when coming from Kenya, there is no official check-point or gate where people would be forcefully stopped.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.3 Vegetation

There is an abundance of woody vegetation in the semi-arid area of Butemine. The main types of trees found are i) *Acacia tortilis* (*mukamehe*), *Balanites aegyptica* (*mujuya*), *Euphorbia candelabrum* (*kiroha*); ii) *Vangueria apiculate* (*mugholoma*), *Ficus sycomorus* (*mukoyo*), *Trichilia emetic* (*mudaghamira*); and iii) *Croton dictygamus* (*mugilalugi*), *Euphorbia tirucalli* (*kidigho*), *Grewia bicolor* (*ebusyeni*) (Smith 1993; Smith, Meredith, and Johns 1996). Of the many types of woody vegetation found in Butemine, the Batemi collect over 100 for various uses in their domestic economy (Smith 1993). This large number of plants used in various ways (e.g. as construction material, domestic instruments, firewood/fuel, or for medicinal purposes) points to an

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<sup>6</sup> A good number of Kenyans have settled in the Loliondo area in the past, some without ever having pursued proper legal documentation or permits. Within the last five years, the Tanzanian government has put more pressure on the Immigration Department to control the status of foreigners within its border. Previously, the border had been loosely controlled by the district government, but in 2011 an immigration officer was installed in Loliondo with the task of checking up on people’s immigration status. As a consequence of this new government policy, many Kenyans who had settled on the Tanzanian side of the border many years ago were threatened with eviction.

intense interaction with their ecological environment. The findings of these studies date back to the 1990s and it has to be noted that today there is less use for woody construction because houses (except in the village centre – *kaaya*) tend to be built with burned bricks and corrugated sheets rather than with poles and a thatched roof. But in most other cultural domains, the Batemi continue to depend heavily on woody plants to maintain their subsistence life-style, especially for firewood and fencing material.<sup>7</sup> Our next-door neighbour in Ebwe, Baradi Barasayedi, is one of the exceptionally skilled Batemi who would carve knife handles, bows, whisks, and other utensils, using a different kind of wood suited to the purpose. For example, the long walking stick with its forked end can be used to lean on, or to arrange a thorny hedge if turned around. The manufacturing of household utensils from wood and other natural products (e.g. eating dishes from calabashes, spoons from cow horns, needles from animal bones, leather bags, ropes, and capes) meant that there was little environmental pollution until ten years ago. Unfortunately, the availability and circulation of plastic, cell batteries, and electronic devices has brought considerable pressure on the environment because these materials are basically disposed of in similar fashion as natural products, though not disintegrating in the same way.

The climate in Butemine and the availability of irrigation water favour the cultivation of a wide variety of crops and vegetables. In the 1950s the Batemi were known to grow sorghum (*sorghum bicolor*), sweet potato, beans, cowpeas, and bulrush millet. Since then they have introduced maize, other bean varieties, cucurbits cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, and bananas. Furthermore, since the 1970s there are papaya, mango, lime, avocado and lemon trees. Maize has become a staple food and is planted in most irrigated fields because of its easy maintenance, shorter growth period, and higher resistance against diseases. Finally, there are farmers who grow tobacco which they grind into snuff and share freely among men and women, and gourds which – dried and hollowed out – serve as milk containers.

Besides herbivorous insects which occasionally destroy entire crops, there are mammals which present a threat to the harvest; elephants, bush pigs, porcupines,

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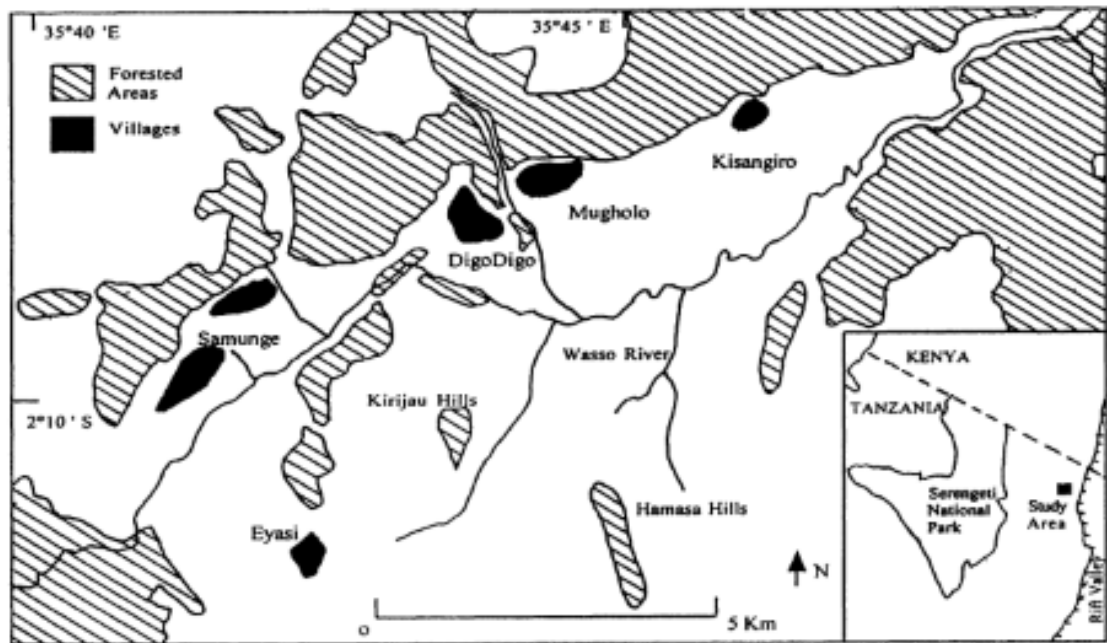
<sup>7</sup> One of the most remarkable changes over the last 20 years occurred in the style of building Temi houses. In the middle of the 1990s there were only a handful of stone or brick buildings with corrugated roofs (mostly schools or government buildings); the traditional house consisted of a round pole construction, a centre pole, a thatched roof, and a court-yard with a solid pole fence. The new building style and the changed spatial arrangements have an impact on other social orders, such as gender relations. It used to be customary to build a house collectively, believing that this would protect a home from destructive influences.

baboons and vervet monkeys. Birds are known to invade sorghum fields (less so the maize fields). The protection of these fields is time-intensive because it means that people have to set up camps near the fields over a longer period of time.

## **2.4 Rainfall and Irrigation**

With an average annual rainfall of 400-600 millimetres which is below the needed amount for a decent agricultural harvest, Butemine is classified as a semi-arid area. There are two rainy seasons, a shorter one in November/December (*mbura ya magare*) and a more intensive one in April/May (*mbura ndane*). The rains are far from reliable and over the last ten years I have seen many failed attempts in preparing fields and sowing seeds. People do not blame global warming – a foreign concept which they may have heard of in the news – but they point to Mugwe (God) and that everything is under his control.

The Loliondo highland divides two drainage basins, on the Western side the rivers flow toward Lake Victoria, on the Eastern side toward Lake Natron. There is only one perennial river, the Lelessuta, which flows along the north of Raghari and then in a bend to Kura and finally spills into Lake Natron near Pinyinyi. This water can only be exploited by some fields in Raghari and Kura, but not in the main valley where most of the fertile ground lies. The Wasso River (Juhe) is a seasonal river which often floods the valley floor after intense rains in the higher areas of Wasso and Loliondo and is therefore not useful for agricultural purposes. There are, however, numerous perennial streams along the slopes of the valley around which the Batemi have situated their villages and village clusters. These streams are the lifeline that grant the Batemi survival in an otherwise harsh environment.



Map 2.2 Rivers and Streams in Butemine (from Smith 1993)

It is not surprising that the waters from these sources are not only the centre of attention in terms of agricultural benefits, but also affect political and religious power structures. This will be discussed further in chapter 3.4. Here is a brief overview of their irrigation system as it is still practised today.

The type of irrigation system the Batemi practise is called ‘hill-furrow’ irrigation which makes use of natural gravity, diverting water with the help of artificial canals into the fields on the valley floor. Other places where this technique is applied to secure adequate food supply are found in Konso (Ethiopia), in Kenya with the Pokot and Marakwet along the Kerio valley and the people around Taveta and Taita. In Tanzania it is practised at Mto wa Mbu, and by the Pare of the Usambara region (Adams, Potkanski, and Sutton 1994, 20).

The villages of Soyeta and Ebwe in the main valley, and Eroghata in the south-western corner of Butemine are entirely dependent on spring water for their irrigation activities. Other villages like Raghari and Kura are able to use larger perennial streams to feed their fields.

The management of this small-scale irrigation system requires the cooperation of the entire community, therefore permeating domestic social life and affecting political structures. I do not concur with Schäfer’s view that Robert Gray, the first substantial ethnographer of the Batemi, had it all wrong when he presented the irrigation system as the core domain around which Temi culture was constructed. Water is of importance as an image around which their society is constructed and through which the Batemi



communicate important messages to each other.<sup>8</sup> For example, the image of water is used to indicate if a group of men is allowed to speak about secret matters (they say: the water is clean), or not. Water is also the symbol of life-giving fluids (male semen and female fluids). It is used when a taboo has been broken to cleanse the transgressor and the land (*esabya mai*), and also to announce a time of sexual licence during the *mase* ceremony when it is said that ‘the water gates are open’.

Temi irrigation agriculture is deeply integral to and associated with other aspects of the world they inhabit; to neglect these aspects can only result in a great misunderstanding (Adams, Potkanski, and Sutton 1994; Potkanski and Adams 1998a). Therefore, it is completely misleading to say that the *benamijye* ‘own’ water rights, or that the water is their ‘private property’ (Potkanski and Adams 1998a, 87). The *benamijye* – as well as the *baghɔrɔwane* (priests) – are candid about the fact that the water comes from Mugwe (God), as the springs were given to them by the hero-god Ghambageu. The elders are only put in charge as guardians to protect the water and its springs, and to oversee the proper distribution of it. To do so they have been handed down a set of instructions, the customary law which the Batemi call *gitemi*. The *benamijye*’s residences are located at a higher elevation of the slopes, overlooking the village. It is a symbolic expression of their position as overseers and guardians. Their houses are clustered around the dancing plaza and the meeting points (*ghuseri*), but also within a short walking distance from the springs which can be accessed on a path through dense brushwood. The *benamijye* regularly visit the spring area to check its flow and to make sure that nothing has been disturbed in this restricted area. They enter the stream and walk along its course, cleaning the surface from twigs and leaves that have fallen into the water. Again, this symbolically expresses how they care for and protect the water. In terms of water distribution the *benamijye* are handed the mandate to distribute water to the community without demanding any fees for it. It is misleading to speak of ‘private ownership’ in Temi culture because their concepts of ‘private’, ‘collective’ and ‘ownership’ are quite different from our own.

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<sup>8</sup> I agree, although I argue this for different reasons. Gray was essentially testing a hypothesis set forth by Wittfogel’s analysis of hydraulic societies in Asia and the claim that these societies necessarily will be ruled by despotic regimes. Gray’s main attention was therefore held by the question of what kind of political system a small-scale community practicing irrigation agriculture in East Africa would develop. In contrast to this view, Schäfer concentrated on how the Batemi construct a moral human being through gender division and ceremonial practices.

## 2.5 Subsistence Agriculture

The Batemi are a subsistence farming society using, as we have seen, the contribution of spring water to irrigate their fields. The agricultural land is divided into the sandy *magare* fields above the water canals which are dependent on rainfall, and the *huura* fields at the floor of the valley which are fed with irrigation water. There are other fields along the outskirts of the Butemine land with fertile soil. These areas have no access to spring water but receive above average rainfall because of the higher altitude (e.g. Mageri, Eyasi/Maloni, Eroghata). The agricultural techniques have changed over the past fifty years; formerly, working the fields was a gender-divided activity with the men slashing and clearing the fields and the women collectively planting, harvesting and managing the distribution of crops. This explicit gender role division is no longer practiced today as economic responsibilities are shared among the family members. The use of agricultural tools has also undergone significant changes. The digging stick (*mulɔ*) which was used in the 1950s has been replaced by the steel hoe, followed by the iron plough, and finally, the arrival of the modern tractor. It is interesting, though, that earlier farming tools like the digging stick are still in use today. How the modernization of farming was perceived in the 1950s is captured by Gray's account of a district official introducing new farming methods to improve the food production:

Mr. Paulo Dick, a Tanganyika Government Agriculture Instructor arrived last week from Loliondo to instruct Sonjo farmers in modern techniques of cultivation. In an exclusive interview with a HERALD reporter (this is Robert Gray's fictive newspaper through which he is reporting to a friend of his, KD), Paulo explained that his assignment was to teach the Sonjo how to plow with oxen. 'When this art has been mastered', he stated, 'food production in the country will be considerably increased. Famine years may then be a thing of the past.' Paulo will start working at Samunge and then continue at the twin villages of Digodigo Juu and Digodigo Chini. At present these are the only villages at which cattle are kept. Another milestone of progress is marked at Sonjo with Paulo's visit (Gray 1955).

But the enthusiastic government worker was soon enough confronted with the resistance of the Temi farmers:

When the elders of Samunge were sounded for their opinion, they stated that the plan was basically unsound. One of the leading elders explained that to tie an ox to an unwieldy iron contraption and force it to pull undoubtedly did the animal great harm. 'We are all for progress,' he said, 'but when visionary schemes of this kind are foisted upon us, common sense must prevail.' He went on to point out the plain indecency of making animals do the work of women. 'May the time never come when we look on our cattle as things to be used and broken like tools,' he said. 'This is a rash and foolish venture.' (Gray 1955, 28 Oct)

And in another story from the same momentous transition, the Batemi's response toward imposed change highlights that their attitude is not one of passive submission but rather an active intervention combining ingenuity and humour:

A few years ago an overzealous agriculture officer brought 200 iron hoes to Sonjo and distributed them to be used in place of digging-sticks. The women were scandalized at the time and demanded that they be destroyed. But the resourceful Sonjo people found a better use for them. They were converted into cymbals which are played by warriors at dances. 'Instead of mocking our God as the foreigners intended,' an elder said, 'they now ring out his glory at every sacrifice. If the digging-stick was good enough for our grandmothers,' he continued, 'it is good enough for our wives. If we give in on this issue, they will be asking us next to buy cloth for our women and throw away their goat-skin garments.' (ibid. 1955)

The digging stick is still considered one of the most defining implements of Temi culture, as this saying captures: *Bantu balelaga mulɔ jojo judinko* (the people are being fed by this little digging-stick). But these incidents clearly reveal an attitude of self-determination and refusal to allow outside interference to dictate the course of their lives. The same sentiment is still alive today. Over the years we lived in Ebwe we have frequently witnessed the same ironic spiel between the local Temi community and government officials who want to introduce more progressive farming methods. The government officer is received honourably and delivers his speech with great decorum and enthusiasm, but little or nothing is implemented after his departure. Agricultural innovations have been tried with new hybrid maize grains, combining maize and beans in the same field, fish farming, growing cash crops like paprika, or reconstructing the irrigation system. Overall it is remarkable how very similar the situation is today when compared with how Gray described the attempts to improve cultivation or sanitation methods (Gray 1955). Cultural change very seldom occurred through the imposition from an outside source or the Tanzanian government; it was more likely to come from within the society because of gradual changes which lead to a break-down or rejuvenation of their social practices.

Despite a few farmers who have begun large-scale farming with the use of tractors and hired work crews, the majority of Batemi continue small-scale farming. In a year with normal rains on average they harvest four to five bags of maize per hectare (1 Tanzanian hectare is smaller than the European, around 60 x 60 metres) which is sufficient food for a family. The crops are stored in small free-standing granaries next to the house for maize (*mutala*), or in large leather bags in the back corner of the house for millet and beans (*kibɔndɔ*). Because of irregular rainfall in the last decade and the increased circulation of money, trading with grains has become more common with the price of maize doubling or even tripling at a time of a drought. Such developments have

left many Batemi exposed to severe struggles to maintain their livelihood despite their back-up food supply of green vegetables and sweet potatoes. The instability in rainfall has led to a higher demand of irrigation water which in turn has put the *benamijye* under more pressure because the amount of water resources is, of course, limited.

## 2.6 Demography

In terms of Temi population growth, Gray had put down the meagre number of 4,800 in the middle of 1950. There was modest growth until 1988 and even 2002, but a doubling of the population within a ten year period between 2002 and 2012<sup>9</sup>. This was partly due to the increase of health care coverage in the area and improved infrastructure.

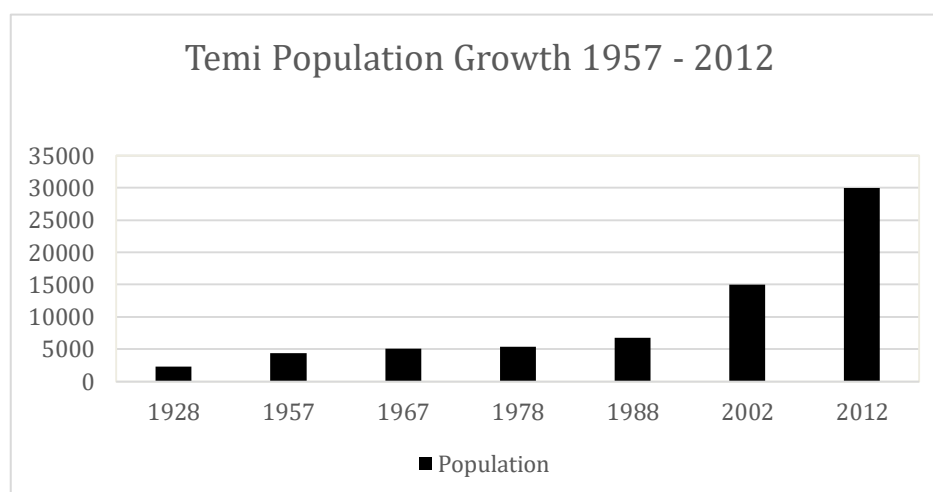


Table 2.1 Temi population growth 1957-2012

In the past, the much smaller population lived in more condensed and protected village territories. Danielson reports a visit of the village of Soyeta in the late 1940s and how there were manned village gates through which people had to pass in order to enter the *kaaya* (Danielson 1959, 153). Strangers would not be allowed to enter the village but had to wait outside the gates to meet the elders. The villages were built along the

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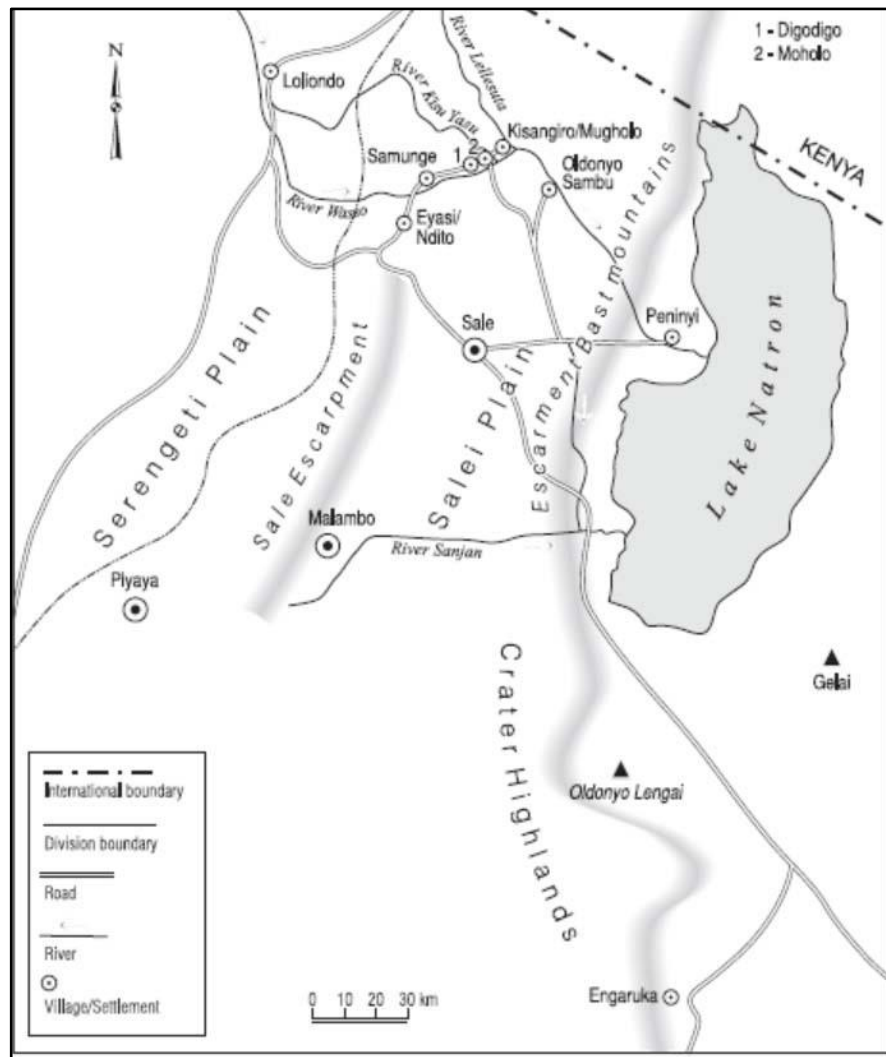
<sup>9</sup> Figures taken from Gray (1974 [1963], 25) and the Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.nbs.go.tz>.

rocky slopes on the high end of the escarpments with each house set on a cleared platform. The village was completely surrounded by dense bushes for protection against attacks from Maasai raids. Only a few years later, Gray described that these fortifications around the village were no longer as functional as Danielson had seen them (Gray 1974). Today the population has increased to around 6,000 – 8,000 in the village of Ebwe alone and people are moving further outside the village territory into Sumine (the grazing area on the opposite side of the valley) and *bweelo* (the wilderness). The village gates (three in Ebwe) are kept in good condition because some of them are of symbolic meaning in their ceremonies, especially during the initiation rites.

Reverberations from earlier conflicts are felt most acutely in the settlements along the outskirts of Temi territory, the so-called satellite villages. These are the areas, especially along the northern border villages of Tinaga and Mageri, but also in Maloni, Masusu, and Hajaro, which are most exposed to Maasai raids. There is a history of militant conflicts in these places when the inhabitants of these villages had to abandon their homes and seek shelter in the more central villages of Soyeta, Ebwe, Mugholo or Raghari. Once a peaceful and stable relationship was re-established with the Maasai leaders, the Batemi would gradually return to these satellite villages and start farming the land again (Ojalammi 2006). Today, the land conflict between the Batemi and the Loita Maasai is still fragile and has become more complicated, not least because of government interventions and attempts to impose fixed border lines instead of allowing the involved parties to negotiate flexible borders with a buffer zone which is used alternately by the Maasai and the Batemi.

Administratively, Butemine belongs to the Ngorongoro district which is part of the Arusha Region. Ngorongoro district is subdivided into Loliondo and Sale sections with administrative headquarters in Loliondo. Ngorongoro district is also home to the world-famous Serengeti National Park and the Ngorongoro Crater, both of which are classified as World Heritage Sites which generate a large part of Tanzania's tourism revenue and therefore represent substantial economic and political power. The political and administrative posts are occupied by Tanzanians from other areas of the country and the Batemi have little say in the management of these institutions or in the way revenues are re-distributed into the society.

The district comprises three divisions (Sw. *tarafa*): Ngorongoro, Loliondo and Sale and each division is subdivided again into wards (Sw. *kata*). Below the ward level are the individual villages.



Map 2.3 Ngorongoro Division with wards (Ojalammi 2006)

## 2.7 Space and territorial order

Writing about the Batemi or Sonjo, ethnographers, linguists, missionaries and historians refer to their unusual geographic and ethno-linguistic position in the East African hinterland. For example, Nurse and Rottland are interested in the Sonjo because ‘the community having lived for centuries as an isolated enclave of scattered villages among the Maasai’ (Möhlig et al. 1994, 172). Schäfer concludes that the Batemi’s isolated situation and their vicinity to the Maasai ‘potentially hostile area’ has shaped their self-consciousness (Schäfer 1999d, 13). And if one thinks the Serengeti plains are hard to reach, ‘Beyond the Serengeti Plains’, as Betty Gray’s book about the Sonjo is entitled, underscores that sense of remoteness. Trips to Butemine must have been indeed

exhausting in the middle of the 1950s. ‘After three days of hard driving we had finally arrived at our destination, the land of the Sonjo in northern Tanganyika,’ Gray reports (1971, 17).<sup>10</sup>

### **2.7.1 Arrangement of village space**

How societies communicate through specific ordering of space has been a long-standing concern in anthropology (Leach 1976; Moore 1996; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003; Shetler 2007). As Warf and Arias point out, ‘geography matters, not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because where things happen is critical to knowing how and why they happen’ (2014,18). The arrangement of space represents the intersection and separation of nature and culture; it is a cultural matrix which communicates social principles, dichotomies, gender relations, and even cosmic organization. Again, the underlying classifications expressed through spatial order should not be seen as fixed structures, but more as man-made realities which can be changed by others. Analyses of spatial patterns follow the same principle as analyses of time periods: people experience neither space nor time as abstract mental imprints, but as consequent moments of their lives, or of entering a place through their bodily senses and moving around in a landscape, performing an activity or moving through the calendar year. Shetler (2007) beautifully describes how the Western Serengeti landscape can be perceived alternatively in terms of its ecological, social, or sacred relevance. Each perspective foregrounds a different aspect and engages with the land accordingly. The elders of the Mara region who had been pushed out of their ancestral land and for many years were not able to access it, remembered the sacred sites of old and still felt a deep connection with them. People do not forget the sacred places around which their lives revolve. For the Batemi the sacred areas are the grounds surrounding the springs with the offering sites, the dense bush with the secluded grove where they initiate the boys into manhood, the men’s meeting places where current issues are discussed, and the temple houses with their adjoining area.

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<sup>10</sup> The infrastructure which connects the Batemi with the rest of Tanzania is either nonexistent or in desolate condition (Schäfer 1999d, 13). Today the road maintenance has improved and for the last year a weekly bus service carries people from Digodigo to Arusha.

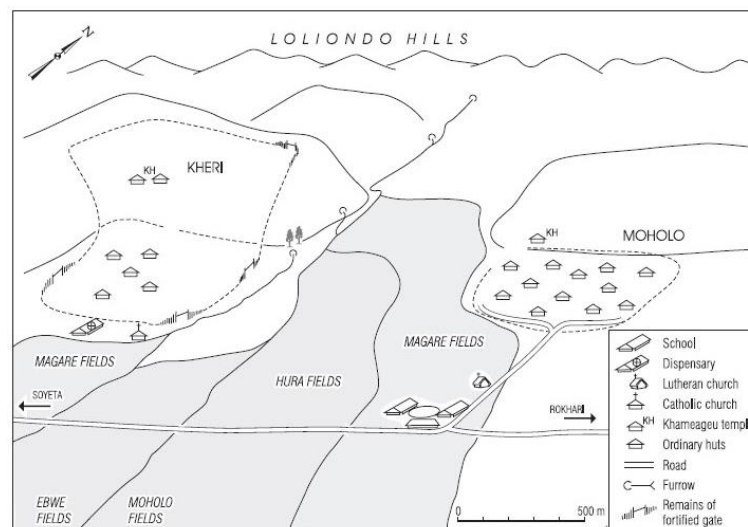
Henrietta Moore convincingly portrayed how with the Marakwet of Kenya the distribution of power is interrelated with the representation and maintenance of spatial order. Observation of sacred, gendered, and domestic spaces is not done haphazardly, because it reflects social hierarchy and power structures (1996, 79–97). Furthermore, Moore claims that social change is more likely to occur when crucial social space is being rearranged than by any other means. The question I am asking here: is the same principle true for the Batemi? Does the arrangement of local territory represent something of the gender relation and the socio-political hierarchy? And are the *benamijye* as the traditional guardians of their society concerned that these spatial arrangements are upheld? And finally, assuming that modern life invariably means change – also change of spatial order – which then are the spaces that are contested most fiercely, and which are reproduced in other ways?

By drawing borders the Batemi not only designate specific areas for certain uses, but they exclude people from entering particular (public) spaces and thus exercise discrimination against others. Territoriality is thus inherently conflictual because the organization of space is often used to exercise power (see Sack in Ojalammi 2006, 25). Temi women, for example, are not allowed to enter the wooded spring areas for fear of contaminating the water and the fields; women are also excluded from trespassing into the elders' meeting grove (*ghuseri*). From these and other examples it can be seen how Temi practices correspond with the idea that territoriality includes a form of classification of an area, a form of communication of boundaries, and a manner of enforcing or restricting access to an area and a way to punish illegitimate access (Ojalammi 2006, 26). Space is therefore never neutral, but rather organized in complex configurations of semantic codes which represent political and gendered social structures.





the fields.<sup>12</sup> Today this gender division has become more fluid and is no longer as strict as it used to be. Because of the need to generate school fees for the children, the parents often share their domestic responsibilities and arrange their work pragmatically to exploit small-scale business opportunities on a local or regional level. But in essential ways and especially when it comes to ritual matters, the majority of the Batemi adhere to traditional gender rules. The two significant events that link the male to the wilderness and the female to the house are the name-giving ceremony shortly after birth (*ehira moi*) and the male initiation ritual (*esabaga*). Again, the borderline between the inhabited area of *kaaya*<sup>13</sup> and *bwεelo* is blurred today because of the expansion of human settlement into the previously uninhabited area across the valley. In the 1940s the villages were still fortified with a thick thorn fence which separated the village territory from the outside fields, grazing land, and the wilderness beyond (Danielson 1959, 154). Even Potkanski sketching the village outlines of Ebwe (Digodigo) around 1990 indicates that most people lived in or around the old *kaaya* settlement. Today more than half of the population of Ebwe is settled on the Sumine side of the valley.



Map 2.5 Huura and magare fields of Ebwe and Mugholo (Potkanski 1987)

<sup>12</sup> This type of constructing the social person is not untypical in traditional societies (cf. Beidelman 1997a, 1–29). Beidelman believes that the centre of gravity in the formation of Kaguru gender lies with their initiation processes (Beidelman 1997a, 131–80).

<sup>13</sup> *Kaaya* is a common Bantu word for ‘settlement, home, village’. In Giryama *kaaya* denotes the sacred grove which is *not* inhabited but used only for ritual purposes and thus kept intentionally free of any contamination (Parkin 2006).

### **2.7.2 Exploiting unused territories and ensuing conflicts**

Along with a growing population came an increased appetite for arable land. Over the last two decades, young people have started to clear and convert bush-land into arable fields. These newly cleared fields often lie in areas which were considered no-man's land, a sort of buffer zone between the different Temi villages and Maasai territory. Village boundaries are seldom clearly demarcated and mostly a matter of the elders' jurisdiction and their memory. As to be expected, when people from one village started to clear fields along the village outskirts, people of the neighbouring village intervened and claimed it was their land. Over the last years, a series of serious conflicts flared up between the villages of Ebwe and Soyeta.<sup>14</sup> A similar situation emerged between the Batemi and the Maasai of the Loita section along the northern Temi boundaries; a stretch of land which was used intermittently by the Maasai as grazing area and by the Batemi as arable land in mutual consent, became the bone of contention when the parties began to make permanent claims of the land.<sup>15</sup> The interventions of the Tanzanian government to reconcile the parties have only aggrieved the Loita Maasai and the Batemi further because each party felt they were being treated unjustly.<sup>16</sup> With a growing population and the consequential increase of demand for land, this socio-political conflict is likely to continue in the future.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The Batemi conceive and imagine themselves as embedded in a particular landscape which gives them orientation in their daily lives. Spatial orientation and designated territories are also crucial categories in Temi cosmology, because they help to order the world and human behaviour. Furthermore, their home territory with its hills and valleys,

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<sup>14</sup> In 2004 two people were shot dead while working in the fields. The conflict was followed by a long period of reconciliation meetings. Today, the conflict has quieted down but remains essentially unresolved with mutual distrust still lingering.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ojalammi, and other articles on Loliondo/Sonjo conflict.

<sup>16</sup> Communication with Dr. Eamon Brehonny, Arusha, who was called in as a consultant and mediator in the case.

streams and fields, shrines and unpopulated areas, remind the Batemi of their past. And it is their history which I will discuss in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 3**

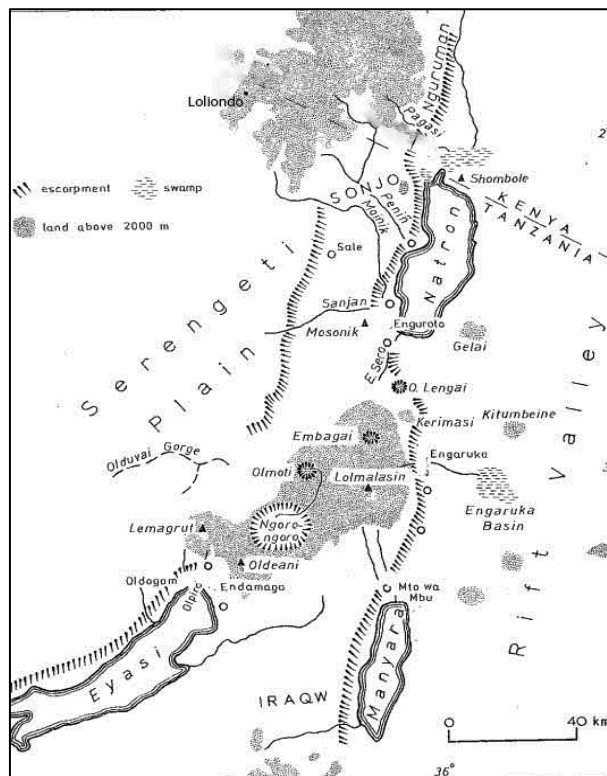
### **3. TEMI HISTORY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The history of the Batemi can be considered from various perspectives and using different methods. Drawing from a range of historical evidence, an attempt is made to present an overview of the most salient features of Temi history. After tracing Temi history from archaeological and linguistic grounds, a summary of important Temi oral histories is presented. There is a noticeable discrepancy between the Batemi's own accounts of their history and the outsider's scientific assessment. The chapter ends with a description of the history of the Christian Church in Butemine.

#### **3.2 Archaeology**

The history of the Rift Valley Region (see figure below) can hardly depend on oral history which, after all, only reaches back into the more recent past. Linguistic and archaeological data provide more reliable evidence to construct how this region was populated before the 1800s (Spear and Waller 1993a, 38–60; Kimambo and Temu 1971, 1–13; Sutton 1990, 29–40; Ehret 1998; Ehret 2010).



Before the boundaries of Tanganyika started to take shape in the 1880s, a multitude of people groups of different political structures populated the area; in the West Lake (Victoria) region several kingdoms were competing with each other. The western and central region was occupied of groups led by *ntemi* or *mutemi* leaders<sup>1</sup>, men who were not of a royal lineage but nevertheless possessed sacred symbols and were politically powerful. In the north-eastern region groups like the Pare, the Samabaa and others around Mount Kilimanjaro organized their societies through skilled leaders (e.g. from the clan of the blacksmiths, the Turi) and through the establishment of local councils and ‘ministerial’ posts. The overall geo-political situation of this region between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries was one of continuous movement of people groups. Ethnic communities competed over land resources, as a result of which some groups disappeared, fused with others, and re-emerged with new identities. It was also a time when political ideas travelled from one group to another and political systems started to take shape (Kimambo and Temu 1971, 14–33). What is notable is that the choice of which political ideology suited them best was not imposed from the

outside but was their own. As will be discussed later, the Batemi still find themselves in a situation which resembles the past history of many groups in Tanzania, namely that their political autonomy is increasingly taken from them and that they are consequently restricted in the exercise of their traditional government system and must instead submit to an ideology which is foreign to them.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of the migration history of East Africa, Sutton outlines what the slow process of migration in and around the Rift Valley and its vicinity could have looked like in the second millennium (Spear and Waller 1993a, 38–60). His focus was the history of the Maasailand, but since the Batemi are geographically engulfed by the Maasai, their socio-political history is naturally entangled with Maasai history.

Sutton suggests that the first food-producers were Cushitic groups who moved from the Ethiopian highlands south and as far as present-day Tanzania at 1000 BCE<sup>3</sup> (Kimambo and Temu 1971, 8–9). Burial sites in areas like Ngorongoro, Kilimanjaro and Rift Valley and the construction of irrigation systems in various places indicate the possibility that these Cushitic people were the ancestors of the present-day Batemi. The Sirikwa were a group of Nilotic descent who occupied the Western Highland region between the Chepalungu forest and the Mau escarpment in the south and Mount Elgon in the north. The Sirikwa were the precursors of the modern Maasai and were cattle herders, somewhat similar to the Maasai but without the drive to expand, and without the weaponry (heavy metal spears) which was developed later on. Pushing south, the Sirikwa eventually splintered off into smaller groups like the Datooga, the Kuria near Lake Victoria or the Luyia near Mount Elgon.

Throughout the complex history of mutual interaction between groups of different origin, agricultural communities often served the pastoralists as refuge in times of drought, supplementing essential resources (food, water, grazing land). Among the various movements of the Highland Bantu groups – who were influenced by Cushitic vocabulary – one offshoot movement from the Mount Kenya region went south towards the Lake Natron region (Sutton in Spear and Waller 1993, 52). This conjecture coincides with Temi oral histories which mention a place called Masing'ane at the shores of Lake Natron. It was the place where the forerunners of the Batemi gathered

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<sup>2</sup> It is notable that the Batemi's political organization does not fit any of the classical descriptions provided in anthropological research (F. Meyer and Evan 1987; Middleton 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Although linguists propose that Proto-Southern Cushites moved toward the Central Kenya highlands around the third millennium BCE (Möhlhig et al. 1994, 229).



and worshipped near a large rock and then dispersed westward into several different groups.<sup>4</sup> According to Sutton, the area near Loliondo (and Ngorongoro) was occupied by Tatog/Datooga before they were pushed further south by the Maasai (1993a, 53). Again, this contact between the Datooga (also called Mang'ati) and the Batemi finds support in some of the oral recollections of Temi elders; the village of Eroghata (Sale) – the most southern placed Temi village – is considered an ethnically 'mixed' village because it was started by Datooga people.<sup>5</sup>

Since the Maasai only expanded into the Rift Valley region in the eighteenth century, the Batemi who have occupied the hilly area between the Serengeti plains and the Rift valley floor must have interacted with previous pastoralist groups. How the Batemi interacted with those groups is not known, but the extended historical perspective challenges the assumption that the Batemi and the Maasai have 'always' been neighbouring groups. Sutton concludes, and this may apply to the Batemi as well, that 'the history of Maasailand ... may be seen as one of versatility and adaptation, as a constant balance between opportunity and identity, with periodically the need for communities to redefine themselves or to revive the pastoral ideal.' (Sutton in Spear and Waller 1993, 59).

### **3.3 The Engaruka connection**

Engaruka is a village along the Rift Valley escarpment around 50 km east of the Ngorongoro crater and 50 km north of Lake Manyara. It is now inhabited by Maasai but the deserted sites give evidence of a group which practised irrigation agriculture there several hundred years ago. How these sites relate to the Temi people, especially the community that lived at Engaruka, is still a matter of scholarly speculation. Sutton suggests that the Batemi could be the descendants of the Engaruka community (1990, 37). This conclusion is drawn from a comparison of how fields and furrows are arranged, the set-up of the village and the kind of pottery produced. Sutton specifically mentions that the outdoor fireplaces at the Engaruka site and those of the Batemi are much alike; this is a rather strange observation since the Batemi only use indoor fireplaces (1990, 37). Further archaeological research and investigations surrounding

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<sup>4</sup> Rec: Masando Sediyya 7 June 2010

<sup>5</sup> Rec: 1 Mar 2007 Eroghata

the Temi irrigation system have been undertaken by Adams, Potkanski, and Sutton (1994), Adams and Anderson (1988), Sutton (Sutton 1984; Widgren 2004), (Seitsonen and Laulumaa 2007; Seitsonen 2006). In 2003 a symposium with 20 archaeologists was held near Arusha dealing with the history of the Engaruka settlement. They concluded that Engaruka was a late Iron Age site. The number of people who inhabited this place varies from 5000 to 40,000 (Laulumaa 2006) and was abandoned around 1700 CE for reasons that are not entirely clear (Sutton 1990, 34). The community was possibly Cushitic speaking (maybe the Iraqw) and upon its collapse dispersed into smaller groups and assimilated with other communities.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.4 History from linguistic data

Derek Nurse and Franz Rottland tried to trace the potential origin of the Sonjo/Temi people on the basis of linguistic evidence (in Möhlig et al. 1994, 171–289). Their aim was to establish the genetic linguistic relation of the Sonjo to other people groups, to re-evaluate Guthrie’s Bantu language classifications,<sup>7</sup> and to shed light on the relationship of the Sonjo and the abandoned site of Engaruka. Their methods used are glottochronology of relevant Bantu, Nilo-Saharan, and Cushitic languages and brief discussions of other linguistic similarities between these languages (phonology, tense/aspect, morphology). Despite the limited source material used for this paper<sup>8</sup>, there is enough substantial evidence to conclude that the Batemi indeed once belonged to a group of Bantu people in Central Kenya. According to Nurse and Rottland, they split up with these other groups (Kikuyu, Kamba, Embu, Meru, Tharaka, Daisu and Cuka) before 500 CE and then migrated south towards Lake Natron and their present settlement during the latter half of the first millennium (Möhlig et al. 1994, 239). This means that the Batemi were in their present place several centuries before the arrival of

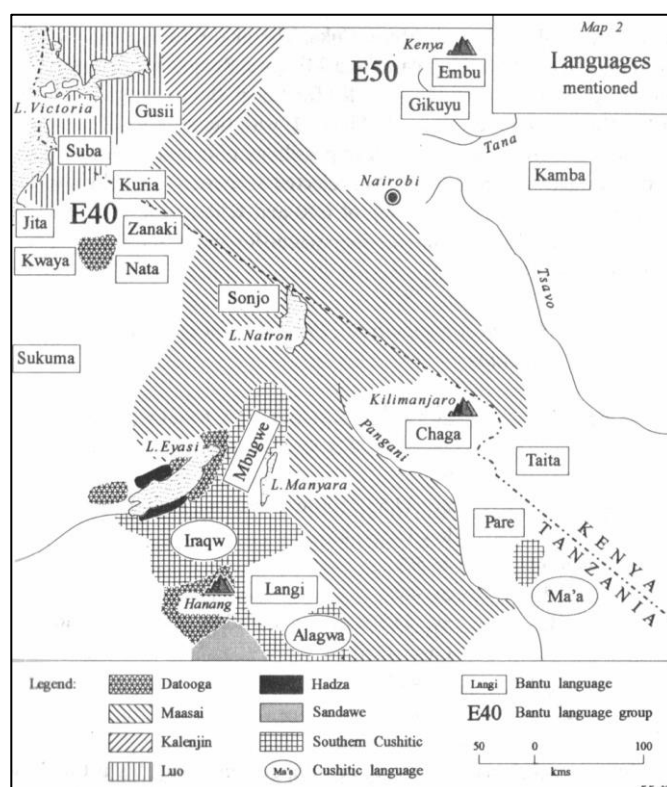
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<sup>6</sup> In only one of my recordings is Engaruka (or Ng’aruga in Maa) mentioned as a place that the Batemi have lived (cf. rec. Giriyama Mbui & Nabudidi, Eroghata, 3 Mar 2007). In 2008 during the celebration of the *mase* season, a delegation of a dozen women and men arrived from Engaruka to receive the blessing of Kirimo in Ebwe. They had walked for four days.

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Guthrie grouped Sonjo with the E40 languages (E46) which would classify it as belonging to the languages of eastern Lake Victoria (Guthrie 1948). In a later work, he groups Sonjo with the E50 Bantu family of Central Kenya (Guthrie 1971).

<sup>8</sup> All of their sources came from people who lived outside of Butemine. The main source (J.N.G. Kadanda) was from Eroghata (Sale) where the language is spoken with a marked difference in vowel quality (i=e, u=o) which is not the representative pronunciation of most other Temi villages.

the Maasai. Another strand of Nurse and Rottland's inquiry was along the question of lexical and phonological transfers to Gitemi (Sonjo) from non-Bantu languages. They found an unusually high number of borrowed words from Southern Cushitic (SC), Southern Nilotic (SN), and Eastern Nilotic (EN).<sup>9</sup> In their view, the Batemi must have lived together with the Datooga people at some point in the last thousand years because of the considerable lexical and phonological input found in Sonjo (Möhlig et al. 1994, 240). In another paper, Nurse and Rottland summarize their findings concerning the question of how the Batemi relate to the aforementioned Engaruka community (1993). The question discussed here is whether the Batemi brought the cultural technique of irrigation management with them when they arrived on the scene near Lake Natron, or if they acquired these skills from another group. Again, the lack of technical/cultural vocabulary does not allow for a conclusive answer. Based less on linguistic evidence but on similar cultural practices (irrigation agriculture), Nurse and Rottland believe that it can only be the Sonjo who lived at Engaruka and abandoned it around 300 years ago (1993, 4–5).



Map 3.2 Linguistic Map Rift Valley Area (Nurse & Rottland, 1991)

<sup>9</sup> Nurse and Rottland admit that their word collection does not allow for much cultural conclusion. One relevant clue for this study, though, is the mention of the Gitemi word Ghambageu which they derive from the Datooga (Southern Nilotic) *qwambagweu* (great grandfather).

Nurse and Rottland's discussion is an important piece of the puzzle in the reconstruction of the history of the Batemi. Another such piece is contained in the oral history of the Batemi, in the songs they sing and the stories they tell each other. This will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.5 History from oral recollections

In many African societies to 'narrate the past', as Tonkin reminds us, reveals traces of the roots of African people, roots which ground their existence and identity in a cosmology of their own.<sup>10</sup> How oral traditions contribute to the history of a people has been explored in depth over the last decades (cf. Spear 1974; Spear 2003; Finnegan 1976; Finnegan 2007; Vansina 1996; Vansina 1985; Connerton 1989). At this point I want to look at the most pertinent oral traditions which are told by the Batemi because, in conjunction with the linguistic and archaeological evidence I mentioned above, these provide some missing clues which help to achieve a more complete picture of their past. In these stories, there is often an overlap and combination of genres when, for example, mythical figures are incorporated in historical events, or vice versa, when historical characters such as Ghambageu are apotheosed in the course of history. There is no canon of stories or any overseeing authority that sanctions the authenticity of traditional accounts. Each village has its own recollections of how the first clan members settled in their area and claimed specific land and water rights. Furthermore, each village has its own version of the Ghambageu narrative and how he left a distinct mark on their community.

The Batemi distinguish between the stories about the remote past and the more recent colonial past which was either witnessed by elders or told to them by their parents. The stories about the remote past are called '*ngano ya kala*' (accounts of the

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<sup>10</sup> Oral history is different from the modern literate history in that it does not base its logic on written sources for its argumentation of cause and effect which 'explain' historical phenomena. Oral tradition is, by the very fact of its mode of communication, prone to fall prey to falsification and distortion, and can therefore not be of equal value as written sources. Is there a way to synthesize Malinowski's functional and Levi-Strauss' structural view of oral history? Spears suggests dividing the oral accounts into different periods, all of them being meaningful in different ways for the understanding and formation of the identity of the society.

past). These tell of the very beginning of time and the formation of the world, e.g. how the Batemi started to farm, bear children, or how they first received fire. Moon, Sun, and Stars play prominent roles in these stories. The time period these stories refer to is immemorial and they will therefore not concern us at this point in the attempt to reconstruct Temi history. Another set of stories which also fall under the type of *ngano ya kala* are about Ghambageu and other hero-gods, but they refer to a middle time period that lies between the earliest era and the present. These stories have a higher currency among the Batemi and are more relevant because they explain or validate present habits and social institutions such as the *etngɔ* (village council). My hypothesis is that Ghambageu was a historical character, possibly a Datooga prophet, who appeared on the scene at a time of great ecological crisis (a famine, disease, or war) and in this opportune moment brought relief to the community by re-organizing their social and religious outlook. After his passing he was promoted as their god. This could have happened as recently as two or three centuries ago.

### 3.6 Masaba and Masing'ane

There are two place names which occur more frequently than others in Temi oral history; Masaba and Masing'ane. Masaba is a montane forest along the Loliondo mountain ridge, and it is generally used to express the northward direction. Masaba also has linguistic significance in connection with the male initiation secrets because it is in the forest that the secret is hidden, and the men who keep the secret hidden are likened to a forest as dense as the *masaba* forest. Masing'ane is associated with a place north of Lake Natron where a group of *bahumba* (Gitemi: 'a mass of people') were still united with those who later split up and formed different ethnic groups, like the Ikoma and others now living in the Mara region east of Lake Victoria. While not exactly confirming the hypothesis based on linguistic evidence that the Batemi migrated from the Central Kenya region, it does not contradict that theory. If they had moved down along the Rift Valley, the area around Lake Natron could be where they passed through before finding refuge in the hills of what is today Butemine.

This is one account as it was told in an interview by Dawalase, the main *ghɔɔwane* of in Ebwe:

We the Batemi came from Masaba. Our name, Batemi, comes from Masaba. The Batemi were called Basyaalo. We Batemi all came from the place called Basyaalo. We are called Basyaalo. We came from there, Masaba.

You have been told that the villages of the Batemi are 12 in number.

The villages of Masaba include Syaalo. Syaalo is the main place the Batemi were born. The Batemi rose up, and they came to Masing'ane. That was the 2<sup>nd</sup> place.

They came to a place called Horane; that was the 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

Then came a place called Tinaga; that was the 4<sup>th</sup> place.

Then came Mageri; that was the largest settlement with Batemi only, the 5<sup>th</sup>

Then came Meeja, close by; it was the 6<sup>th</sup>.

Then came Ngurumani; it was the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Then came Hajaro; it was the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Then came Yasi; it was the 9<sup>th</sup>.

Then came Rima; it was the 10<sup>th</sup>.

Then came a place called Jeema; it was the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Then came a place called Gibiledi; it was the 12<sup>th</sup>.<sup>11</sup>

If the contour of the Temi land sketched in this list of places is correct, it would indicate that the Temi territory was considerably larger than it is today. In the story, none of today's six settlements are mentioned; they all lie more or less in the centre of Butemine. This contraction of their homeland reflects in one very graphic way how the Batemi's existence is under threat as land conflicts along the border increase (especially to the north where the Loita-Maasai constantly contest the border demarcation) as well as group-internal quarrels, often between villages, sometimes within a village community.

Another recollection of an elder who was renowned as a 'Rememberer' (*muteeri*) is the following:

At our homestead I was born an only child, but my grandfather was very rich. All the people used to go to the older men. They asked to hear stories from long ago, asking where the Batemi came from. They say the Batemi come from the East (*ryoba ekela*). They came to a place called Masing'ane. It is an old village, Masing'ane. They left Masing'ane and came to Mageri.

When they were in Mageri, the god (Mugwe) scattered them. He sent safari ants on them, and lots of red bugs. The people were in their fields, and others were in the village. They came until even the houses of the people were spread flat. That is how they overran the place. So the people in the fields were afraid of going home. When they looked at the houses, they saw that it was worse than in the fields. And those in the houses were afraid of going to the fields. People all dispersed because they were afraid.<sup>12</sup>

Another separation of the Temi people and the Ikoma took place in Tinaga according to the following report from a Muturi (the blacksmith clan) in Tinaga by the name of Kasembeyani. He concludes a lengthy story about Ghambageu chasing some people away with burning arrows:

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<sup>11</sup> Rec: Dawalase, 17 May 2005

<sup>12</sup> Rec: Mubande Barasayedi, 17 May 2005

For the Wakurya and the Waikoma, this is where they started from. Forget the places where they have strayed to. And now the Kuria people, their place of origin is here. But the Kuria people were given a portion of land and the Ikoma people were given cows from there by your relatives. That is, listen, we have found that the Batemi of this area, their language is only a little different, nor is it far away. If you pass this mountain of Rongosa, if you wake up here in the morning you see the smoke from their place. It is like this and Mageri. I went to look at their smoke, it was about as far from here as Mageri, the Ikoma people and the Kuria people. And their language is indeed that way and that is how they live.<sup>13</sup>

The historian Jan Shetler has published a book with oral histories from elders of the Mara groups in which a number of these men claim that the Sonjo people are their ancestors (2003). While it is unlikely that there is a direct link between these groups (i.e. Gitemi and the Mara languages are linguistically classified as different language families), the Ngoreme, Ikoma, and Ishenyi people have stories which point to Butemine as their land of origin. Shetler argues that these myths may have emerged at a time when the Mara people were struggling with major natural disasters and war in the nineteenth century and that they were reconstructing their past by using the Sonjo/Temi as their place of origin because it seemed a stable society in midst of much unrest (cf. Shetler 2003). It is likely that groups of hunters from Butemine had set out to the West towards the Western Serengeti plains and came into contact with locals there, or even settled down there. Another link between the Mara groups and the Batemi is that a pilgrimage is undertaken by delegates from these Mara people to Tinaga in Butemine during the initiation period in order to fetch sand and water from their place of ‘origin’ to bless the initiates.<sup>14</sup>

The main trade routes of the nineteenth century did not lead through or even near the Temi area, but went through central Tanganyika and to the shores of Lake Victoria (Hartwig 1970; Holmes 1971; Shetler 2003). Nevertheless, the Batemi did not remain completely unaffected by colonial forces as the following account reflects. Young Temi men were often recruited for road building at a minimal daily wage. Besides a few stone buildings used for court cases and the occasional discovery of cemented dugout shelters which are considered to contain treasures and valuable items left behind by the Germans, there are few visible marks of colonial presence. Mubande Barasayed, an elder and local historian, remembers the *bakoloni* in the following way:

This is how I know it. It was told to me. I did not see it myself. It was not until I became an adult that I understood.

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<sup>13</sup> Rec: Kasembeyani, Tinaga 1 July 2007

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

It is said that a person came here who was a German. He lived there in Bisikene ... The German ruled people harshly. A British man was in Kenya; the German ruled here. The Briton left Kenya and came to Kura. He asked, 'That German who rules and tortures you, where is he?' He was told, 'He's in Soyeta.' He said, 'Would you know the day when he travels?' They answered him, 'Yes.' 'Watch him. When he goes on a journey, come tell us.'

Truly those colonists came to hide themselves along the road from King'orane in foreign parts ... Anyway, the colonists came to ambush the house in Eroghata. The German was killed by the British colonist. Well, all of his Tanzanian guards became afraid. They ran until they came to Eroghata. The German's guards were left behind. They went to Ngaresero to give report of what had happened there. They were brought to Arusha. Now the Germans left Arusha and came to beat up the people of Digodigo. They went around killing people ... now that was the beginning of the war. It continued for some time until it ended. In the end, the British man ruled. He seized authority. He was the one who led the work on the colonists' road. The British man was in charge of all the roads. I tell you, the German used to ride a horse – that was his car. But then the road was made from Arusha to Karatu. The Batemi were seized to work on the road from Karatu to Loliondo. The ones who worked on the road from Karatu to Loliondo were of the age-set named Syabai.

Well, the colonist continued to hire people for work. The British man did not kill people; he hired them. When he had to transport things, he found day workers. He made the roads from this house to Loliondo, to everywhere. People continued in this way until Nyerere pursued independence. That is how I have been told the story. 15

There are more stories which speak to the origin of local practices and clan relations such as the origin of the water springs or the origin of the priestly clan with the *ghorowane* religious practices. These will be dealt with in a separate section.

### **3.7 History of Christian mission in Butemine**

The first European missionaries arrived in the Kilimanjaro area in the 1880s and worked among the Chagga, Meru, Pare, Maasai and Arusha people (Parsalaw 1999; Fleisch 1998; Isichei 1995, 228–63; Spear and Kimambo 1999, 39–62, 196–212; Groop 2006, 50 ff.). After initial struggles and misapprehensions, the Lutheran Church – and other denominations in its wake – was able to establish the Church as an institution that would penetrate these societies. The incentive of an education and the vision of modernizing society, both of which the Church promised, in the end prevailed over the suspicion of those who saw their traditional values undermined and the communal unity

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<sup>15</sup> There are many stories and myths which shed light on the connection between Temi rituals and the ceremonial calendar (chapter 6). A collection of Temi myths is found in the appendix.



threatened. Similar patterns of the Church gaining influence in social and religious spheres can be seen among other people groups surrounding the Batemi; the Kikuyu, Kamba, and the Bantu groups east of Lake Victoria. These people groups, of course, did not accept a wholesale model of Christianity, but engaged and appropriated Christian beliefs and practices as they saw fit with their life circumstances (Iliffe 1979, 216–39; Kimambo and Temu 1971, 123–60).

In comparison, Christianity has reached the Batemi relatively late in the history of the Church. The existence of the Church in Butemine is therefore of recent vintage when likened to the above mentioned, or in comparison with the coastal and southern regions of Tanzania where it is a century older. According to documented sources, the first contacts between the Christian church and the Batemi took place in 1948 when the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church of Tanganyika, which was itself only established six years before, decided to evangelize the ‘tribe of the Sonjo’ (Danielson 1977, 151). By this time, the Church was no longer a missionary-controlled institution, but an effective institution under indigenous leadership. Although the Sonjo (from here on I will use the preferred name Temi or Batemi) lived in the northern zone of Tanganyika, most people in Arusha had never heard of the group. Under the leadership of Pastor Lazarus Laiser the church council approved of the idea of reaching the Batemi with the Gospel. During the synod when the question of a mission engagement was discussed, the proposal found euphoric support:

One delegate spoke glowingly of how missionaries from Europe and America had brought the Gospel to Northern Tanganyika at the beginning of the century. And now God was asking them to bring the Gospel to the Sonjo. This was a great privilege from God. Another delegate said that the parishes should be requested for the money needed for this evangelization task, and the people would respond. In a joyous spirit of dedication and acceptance the Lutheran Church of Northern Tanganyika voted unanimously to accept the task of evangelizing the Sonjo tribe (Danielson 1977, 152).

Judging from the aftermath of the synod decision, their enthusiasm must have been genuine because when the church later asked for two volunteers to serve in a two-year missionary assignment among the Batemi, there were 16 applicants! Eventually Kalebi Mungure, a Meru, and the evangelist Elia Mori, a Mwika, were chosen as the first missionaries.

During a previous visit in the village of Soyeta, the Lutheran church had received an explicit invitation from the village council to bring the Word of God to them; the elders were curious what God had to tell them. Under the auspices of this decreed invitation the Lutherans were able to quickly establish churches in all five Temi

villages. In Soyeta, men and women were baptized and even two members of the village council converted: Nginoria Goroi, who would later become one of the staunchest defenders of the Christian faith and a leader in the church, and Lenoir Gosero. This was a promising start.

However, by January 1952 the Temi elders were deeply concerned about the division between the baptized and non-baptized in the community. In a meeting with the Lutheran missionaries, they pleaded for peace and unity. The elders suggested that all Christians should visit the temple of Ghambageu in Kisangiro (Raghari) to worship at Ghambageu's most sacred site. Then, they went on, upon returning to Soyeta, the elders would announce that the entire village should join the mission (Danielson 1977, 154). The missionaries refused to do so and they parted in deep disharmony. At this point, the village council turned against the church and threatened the Christians with death curses. The elders even went as far as to pronounce the following commands with immediate effect:

1) All Christians and catechumens shall be forced to obey the Sonjo sacrificial customs, 2) Every Christian and catechumen shall be sent a grass rope from the forest which is a sign from the court elders that they want a goat or honey for making beer for their god, 3) Christians and catechumens who break the customs and pronouncements of the court elders shall be cursed, 4) Christians and catechumens shall be refused furrow water for the irrigation of their crops. 5) We shall persuade parents not to send their children to the mission school, 6) To seek to remove the Mission from their country. (Danielson 1977, 154)

The events during the inception of mission work among the Batemi are important because they set a paradigm according to which Christian evangelization would be carried out in the following decades up until the present day. In their missionary fervour and well-meaning actions the Lutheran missionaries completely failed to appreciate the customs and beliefs of the Batemi and instead launched an assault to destroy it. As W.H.R. Rivers forewarned long ago, the missionary 'in destroying the religion or rather in destroying or undermining its ritual and beliefs, he was at the same time, and unwittingly, destroying all that gave coherence and meaning to the social fabric' (in Beidelman 1982, 133).

Ironically, the strongest attack against the traditional practices and beliefs did not come from the missionaries – *their* main failure was to neglect its significance – but from the converted local believers. The Temi Christians often severed all their social and kinship ties and launched severe criticism onto those who continued to practise *gitemi*. As a consequence, the small group of Christians lived in social isolation with little communication between the conflicted parties. The relationship between the Temi

Christians, particularly the men who had already undergone their initiation, and the adherents of *gitemi* customs has been tense and vengeful ever since. The Christians' strategies consisted of defiance toward ritual ceremony or cultic practice. During the British colonial period with the policy of indirect rule, Gabriel Goroi was chosen as the mediating person (*Mangi*) between the community and the district officer in Loliondo. Goroi, a *mwenamijye*, was therefore in a position of some authority. Besides translating for the District Officer, he and two or three of the *benamijye* were given advisory status during court hearings.<sup>16</sup>

Goroi's campaign against the practice of traditional religion continued. In an attempt to exemplify the futility of Temi religion, he cut down a large fig tree along the Soyeta-Ebwe road. The tree was a sacred shrine where people stopped to worship. When Goroi became partially paralyzed after an accident, people accredited his misfortune to the curse of the *etongo*.<sup>17</sup>

In the wake of the Lutheran mission's incursion into Temi territory, the Roman Catholic Church followed suit by sending Roman Catholic school teachers to teach religion in the government schools (established 1948). So far, the Roman Catholic Church had been working among the Maasai, establishing a network of missions and schools with their headquarters in Arusha. In 1955 Father Eugene Hillman from the Holy Ghost Fathers who had been visiting the area over some time, made an official request to build a Catholic mission station in Soyeta (Gray 1955, 27 Sep). Surprisingly, the Soyeta council of elders complied with this request – maybe because they hoped to arrange themselves with the Catholics to fight against the Lutherans. But Goroi immediately challenged the elders' decision:

Contesting the alleged unanimity in favour of the Catholics, Ginoria (Goroi) cited the baptism of twenty-two Samunge people at the Lutheran Church only two weeks ago. He addressed the elders, reminding them that a few years ago they had placed their thumb-prints on a document at Sonjo Baraza which refused the Catholic Mission permission to enter the country. Kalosi Baranayigu then strode before the assembly and leaned on his

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<sup>16</sup> When Goroi was suggested to become the paramount chief (*Mangi*), there was considerable opposition to this choice from elders and the warrior age-set; the young men perceived Goroi as too conservative with his strict church rules and the constant attempt to imitate the European style of clothing and observation of sexual morality. When Goroi was baptized in 1951 after a month-long course in the Lutheran catechism, he was eager to emulate the foreign life-style by building a new brick house next to the mission, learning to write and read, and keeping cattle (Gray 1955, 14).

<sup>17</sup> There are a number of other similar narratives which interlace tragic events together with a person's conduct that caused misfortune to strike. This kind of reasoning which takes account of retributive supernatural ancestral powers is part of the Temi Christians' vocabulary as well as the non-Christians'.

long staff with all the dignity of a prophet of old. 'Bring us that paper now,' he said, 'and we will rub our thumb-prints out.' (ibid. 1955)

Father Hillman carried out his plan and erected a temporary church building where they celebrated the first Catholic Mass. But a few days later, the District Officer, F.G. Finch, heard about these events and summoned all the *benamijye* to a meeting to discuss the legality of these proceedings. One hundred and fifteen elders were present and they voiced their arguments for and against a Catholic Mission. One elder said:

There are two main reasons why we want to be Catholics. First, we will be allowed by that religion to have two wives. Secondly, we will not be prevented, as we would be by the Lutherans, from taking part in sacrifices to our tribal God. In effect we will enjoy the double advantage of having two religions (Gray 1955, 9).

After a long discussion it was decided that the Catholic Church did not have permission to build in Soyeta, nor to carry out religious teaching in a public place. Father Hillman was thus forced to remove the building and move away from Soyeta (ibid. 13).

A Roman Catholic mission was eventually established in Ebwe in 1958 with the first baptisms in 1959.<sup>18</sup> Denis Balanda, an elder from Ebwe who was among the first people to join the church as a young man, named the Catholic missionaries as Fr. Hillman, Fr. Joseph, Fr. James (who built the dispensary next to the church), Fr. Frederik Tramp, Fr. Dennis (who later became the Bishop in Arusha; he also baptized the first Christians in Ebwe), Fr. Vincent Donovan, Fr. Gerard Kohler, Fr. Kilian. The American missionaries from the order of the Holy Ghost Fathers were overseeing the building of the mission, the religious teaching, and the celebration of Mass.<sup>19</sup> The Catholic mission offered food and clothes to children who attended school and a number of children and youths were baptized during the late 1950s and early 1960s. A few Temi men received scholarships for further studies at Roman Catholic seminaries and universities and were ordained (e.g. Fr. Lawrence Ndimeloi, Fr. Webo).<sup>20</sup> The highly educated Catholic missionaries were sensitive of the enormous cultural gap between their own US American culture and its implication to their Christian faith, and African cultures which emphasised different values (Donovan 2003; Bowen and

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<sup>18</sup> Rec: DB, 24 Jan 2011

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Ndimeloi celebrated his first Mass in Ebwe in the presence of a large crowd on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2000.

McLaren 2011; Hillman 1975; Hillman 1993c). They carefully analysed Temi beliefs, especially about the hero-god Ghambageu, and tried to find parallels in the Christian faith which could help to communicate the Gospel message. Especially Vincent Donovan befriended the elders and instructed them in regular meetings about Christianity, but to no avail. The elders decided to stick with their own 'religion' (Bowen and McLaren 2011). Was it possible that the missionaries misunderstood the Temi beliefs to be the centre of gravity of their religious world, instead of paying attention to the mundane domestic behaviour, and ritual actions and ceremonies (*ghorcu*) through which their deeper cultural values are expressed and by which the society is woven together into a coherent fabric?

Most of the Ebwe elders who once were part of the church community now have an ambivalent relation to the church; they identify fully with the *gitemi* traditions and have turned their back on the Catholic Church, yet without being angry or resentful. For them this church was not able to offer any social, religious or economic advantage, nor is she posing a threat to them. At least two Temi men I got to know had undergone formal training at Roman Catholic seminaries and become church catechists, but they were never allowed to play any significant role in the local church and eventually distanced themselves again from church affairs. Today, the local Roman Catholic Church is experiencing a surge in popularity with many Temi women and men attending the church services. A Congolese priest is leading the congregation and two Tanzanian catechists are assisting him. In 2009 a new large church building was consecrated and they have procured land for the building of a new primary school.

Despite the presence of churches or a gathering of Christian believers in every Temi village, the overall number of Christians remains very small, probably less than five percent of the population. Even though there have been significant efforts to evangelize the Batemi, the Gospel has not been able to make inroads into the heart of the communities. This is somewhat surprising because the typical development in other areas in Tanzania shows a different picture whereby people have largely appropriated either Christianity or Islam, both of them foreign religions of a book. So why has Christianity not been able to grow here? Are the reasons to be found in the evangelization methods the churches have employed to reach the Batemi? Or does the more important reason lie within the Temi culture? Have the *benamijye* been able to somehow absorb those elements of Christianity which posed a threat to their traditions and thus deflate the attractiveness of Christianity to their people?

Before concluding this chapter, and by way of offering a possible clue to answering these questions, I want to briefly describe events that took place in 2010 in the village of Soyeta. Ambikile Masapila, a then retired pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, had started to provide people with a ‘miracle cure’ which supposedly healed them of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, and, most significantly, HIV/AIDS. The *Kikombe cha Babu* as it was christened (the cup of the grandfather) was an herbal concoction of the boiled roots of the *mubaghao* tree (*Carissa edulis*) for which Masapila charged a mere 500 Tanzanian Shillings (USD 0.30). When the news reached the wider Tanzanian and East African world that some people were cured of AIDS, it triggered a tremendous rush of tens of thousands of people flooding the remote village of Soyeta. In March 2011, during the peak of the run to Babu a traffic jam of over 25 kilometres blocked the dirt roads leaving thousands of pilgrims stranded in the Temi valley. The affair was highlighted in national and international media,<sup>21</sup> as well as captivating both Tanzanian politicians and church officials, many of whom made a trip to the now famous village in northern Tanzania. Those who could afford it travelled by helicopter or airplane to a nearby airstrip which was prepared ad hoc. The politicians and the leaders of the Lutheran Church quickly sensed that this could be a momentous turn for their country and hailed Pastor Masapila as the ‘Tanzanian Obama’, some suggesting him for the next Nobel Prize, others proudly saying that ‘the whole world will come to bow to an African, and they (the westerners) will no longer look down on us’. Official medical analyses and reports were produced but they remained inconclusive about the efficacy of the cure (Thielman et al. 2014; ‘Loliondo Technical Report’ 2015).<sup>22</sup> The environmental and social impact for the Temi society was considerable and lasted several months before the number of visitors started to drop (Senzota 2012) and normal life routines resumed in Butemine.

But leaving the otherwise interesting socio-political, medical, and psychological aspects of this unusual occurrence aside, what I am interested here is placing this ‘religious’ hype – in which the Batemi were caught up as victims but also actively

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<sup>21</sup> Beginning in March 2011 all major Tanzanian media started to report regularly about the developments of Babu. The articles were mostly sensationalistic, calling Masapila the ‘miracle pastor’. Even BBC and the New York Times found the phenomenon newsworthy (BBC and NYT on 28 March, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Medical personnel in Arusha were frustrated and dismayed with the developments in Soyeta. They saw many of their patients making a trip to Masapila, dropping their prescribed medicine, with their health deteriorating. Pat Patten, a Catholic priest and missionary pilot with the Flying Medical Doctors believes that Masapila is suffering from a mild form of epilepsy which causes the ‘God dreams’, but could easily be cured if medicated (personal communication).

participated – and contrast it with the long and more or less unsuccessful church campaign of evangelizing the Batemi. I am calling it a ‘religious’ affair because there were clear associations with religious imagery such as miraculous healing and supernatural interventions. Furthermore, Masapila was alternatively thought of as a prophet from God, a diviner, a witchdoctor, and miracle man, very seldom as a pastor of the Lutheran Church. In fact people seemed a bit confused by the thought of a traditional healer and a pastor as the same person.

The Batemi responded with mixed reactions to Babu and the masses of strangers who invaded their land and temporarily occupied it. Some were appalled by the ‘uncivilized’ behaviour of the visitors: ‘They are like barbarians, relieving themselves everywhere and littering the entire place, and bathing naked in the stream, men and women together,’ an older Temi woman from Soyeta complained. And she continued: ‘The Batemi are not dirty. We do not have latrines, but we go off into the wilderness. We bathe separately, but these *basyomba* (Swahili people) are disgustingly filthy.’<sup>23</sup>

In all this, the young generation of Batemi saw the opportunity of doing business; in hundreds of make-shift stalls along the road they began to sell food, drinking water, blankets, tarps and tents. Others engaged in the business of transporting people who were stuck in the traffic on motorbikes to Soyeta, of course for double or triple the fare they would normally fetch for the same distance. Another positive effect of Babu’s ministry was that within a few weeks three mobile phone operators had set up antennas to finally connect Butemine to the national mobile phone grid. The Lutheran church experienced an enormous surge in attendance of their services; they had to accommodate up to three services on Sundays in their large church which could hold around 300 people. The new money source enabled the Lutheran Church to complete the construction of their church building which had been in a half-finished state for many years.

The elders kept their distance from Babu and were careful with formulating a judgment. Most Batemi were at liberty to visit Soyeta and drink a cup of the miracle cure – and almost everyone who had an ailment did so – but the elders remained suspicious. Recognizing that something powerful was at hand they issued the following warning in the village: Everybody is free to go and drink the medicine, but if they do so they should follow the exact instructions given to them. They also advised people to be

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<sup>23</sup> Conversation: MG 19 June 2011

careful with their judgement.<sup>24</sup> The elders apparently compared these healings with manifestations of ancestral powers which have to be handled carefully, lest they cause destruction instead of well-being. While some *batana* suggested that he could be Ghambageu who came back to visit them, the elders of Ebwe did not associate Masapila with their own religious world. They recognized, though, that the source of Masapila's healing powers must be from Mugwe, using the generic and unspecific name for God.<sup>25</sup> After all, Masapila grew up as an orphan and it is well known that Mugwe bestows special gifts on orphans.<sup>26</sup> However, the emerging land conflict between the villages of Soyeta and Ebwe gave a new twist to the way the Ebwe elders thought of Masapila. One of the elders said: 'He (Babu) says that God has spoken to him and given him this piece of land?! Why has God not spoken to us? Is God not speaking to us as well?'

As Ole Bjorn Rekdal has pointed out, cross-cultural healing has been and today still is a common practice in Africa (1999). But because of the colonial legacy of thinking about Africa in 'tribal boundaries', and the structural-functional theory in anthropology which conceived cultures as self-sufficient systems, there was little recognition of this phenomenon. Contrary to common assumptions, African societies are flexible and innovative to accommodate new healing methods because of their belief in the healing capacities of the culturally strange and distant. In Temi culture such a dialectic relationship exists between the Maasai and the Batemi. The Maasai recognize the healing and regenerating powers of Kirimo (or *Kirim* in Maasai). Delegations of Maasai men and women visit Temi villages during the *mase* celebration to receive a blessing of healing or prosperity. On the other hand, the Batemi may seek the help of Maasai healers at times of great need for physical healing, but also to consult rainmakers of other groups at times of an extreme drought.<sup>27</sup> Except for the *ghorowane* priests and the *mase* ceremony where physical ailments can be brought forth in a petition to receive a blessing, there are no healers (Swahili *mganga*).

Members of the evangelical churches had an altogether different take on Babu. They saw him as an old man, a stranger at that, who intruded into the Temi social and church affairs. He had no business here and they all hoped that things would return to normal soon. To the evangelical churches, Masapila was a competitor who through his

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<sup>24</sup> Conversation: 15 June 2011

<sup>25</sup> NB Diniase & Kabunjanase 15 June 2011

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Interview: Mbugwe rainmaking, Magugu, 23 Jan 2011



ministry attracted all the attention away from them. Publicly, evangelical Christians claimed that they would not partake of the *kikombe* because this would compromise their exclusive faith in God who is able to heal a person without going to a dubious healer like they took Masapila for.

Two years after the first occurrence of the healing phenomena, Pastor Masapila announced that he had had more dreams in which he saw an even greater mass of people come to Soyeta for healing. In a meeting at his house in Soyeta he showed me a fossilized hand-print which he had found by the guidance of God in the vicinity of the village. According to Masapila, it was the print of a girl by the name of 'Tutali'. Masapila said: 'These prints are just like the ones at Olduvai Gorge.' I asked the question: What will happen next? He said: 'God is showing things slowly to me, bit by bit.'<sup>28</sup> In the meantime Masapila and his crew are busy building a new visitor centre which will provide parking space and accommodate the next flow of visitors. The location for this centre – which again came from a dream – is along the border of the villages of Soyeta and Ebwe, a previously uncultivated piece of wilderness. The Soyeta elders and village administration officially allowed Masapila to develop the plot, but the elders of Ebwe immediately intervened, claiming that the land was part of Ebwe and not Soyeta. This land conflict renewed underlying older hostilities and was cause for new tensions erupting between the two villages. Despite ongoing negotiations, this land conflict is still not settled.

### 3.8 Conclusion

This chapter was concerned with the history of the Batemi, particularly with regard to the village of Ebwe. I pointed out how through oral history the Batemi's past was formative of their identity as it reveals points of contact with other people groups and historical events that shaped them. I also described the geography and the most pertinent spatial arrangements of how the Batemi see the land they live in. The two dimensions of time and space are being probed from an outsider's and an insider's view in order to assist in understanding their cultural identity.

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<sup>28</sup> Conversation with Masapila: 1 Aug 2013

The next chapter looks at some of the most distinct ways of how Temi culture and their religious traditions were portrayed by outside observers who came in contact with them.



## Chapter 4

### 4. REPRESENTATIONS OF TEMI CULTURE

#### 4.1 Introduction

In Edward Said's controversial publication (1979), he shows the depiction of the Orient by Western scholars to be patronizing and demeaning, a fabrication of the mind of unsuspecting authors rather than a true reflection of Oriental cultures. His book sparked a new wave of discussions on the subject of cultural representation (Fabian and Bunzl 2002; Clifford and Marcus 2010; Bachmann-Medick 2009). At the same time, Said acknowledged insurmountable difficulties in any attempt to depict the cultural other:

[T]he real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambiance of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one (and I believe it is), then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth' which is itself a representation (1995, 272).

To fully re-present another culture becomes an illusion because it treats the Other like a static object, rather than a fluid and dynamic phenomenon in constant change (see Clifford and Marcus 2010; especially James Clifford 98–121, and Stephen Tyler 122–40, *ibid.*). Ethnographic writing must not pretend to capture cultural identities as if from a vantage point that allows for an unhindered gaze upon a society. Rather than to represent another culture as an object, Tyler suggests that an ethnography should *evoke* images, voices, and social events through which the reader is able to construe others (*ibid.* 123). To achieve a symmetrically balanced ethnography that distributes power and knowledge equally to the contributing insiders as well as to the writer of the ethnography, a dialogic discourse is needed. It is the dialogic interchange that allows indigenous voices to be heard and creates a polyphonic range of different perspectives on the culture.

The critique against the notion of Orientalism and its misconstruction can be applied in equal measure to the idea of Africa and its cultures (Mudimbe 1994; Mudimbe 1988; Devisch and Nyamnjoh 2011). Until recently, African cultures and religions were studied from within Western categories and thus either labelled

‘primitive’ or ‘pagan’ depending on the degree of familiarity of the observed cultural phenomena with the European matrix. In reference to the study of African religions, it became commonplace to see (European) Christianity as the apex of religious expression. Such one-dimensional translation affected Western, as well as African scholars who began to conceive African Traditional Religion as a single, pan-African belief system, rather than expanding their own concept of religion by incorporating African phenomena (J. Cox and Haar 2003, 39–66; Mbiti 1991; Mbiti 1970a; Idowu 1973). One unfortunate assumption of this approach – with far-reaching consequences – was the conjecture that all African societies believe, in one way or another, in a Supreme Being. This hypothesis facilitated the translation process in that the Supreme God simply assumed the name of the indigenous god, whether it fit the local community and culture, or not (Isichei 1995, 7; Knighton 2010; Knighton 1999). Fortunately, the study of African religions has come of age, and, despite continued debates about the impact and meaning of religion for societies, incorporates African features into a definition of religion (cf. Platvoet and Molendijk 1999; van Binsbergen and Geschiere 2005; Mudimbe 1994; Mudimbe 1988; Ellis and Haar 2004).

The outside observers who approached and interacted with the Batemi – whether with a Christian motive to evangelize them or not – were no exception in their use of ethnocentric lenses. In this chapter I will provide examples of how Temi culture and religion were portrayed and point out the methods by which missionaries and anthropologists gained knowledge about the Batemi. These accounts of the Temi culture emerged during different historical periods and were written by authors with different ideological perspectives. Thus for example, British colonial observers had different interests in Temi culture than missionaries or anthropologists. However, their accounts provide not only a starting point in the search for a better way of understanding Temi culture, but will also serve in the discussion why Christianity failed to gain a foothold in Temi society.

## **4.2 Colonial encounters**

Before the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in Temi territory, British colonial personnel made tentative explorations into Temi culture. The British had replaced the German colonial forces after the First World War and renamed the country ‘Tanganyika Territory’. The headquarters of the British government officials for the Monduli district

(which included Monduli, Ngorongoro, and Sonjo) were in Loliondo. Compared to other districts, the Batemi remained relatively unaffected by colonial policies. However, after a local petition, the acting District Officer appointed a Paramount Chief for the entire Temi area, a position which had not existed before (Gray 1955, Oct 4). Ginoria Goroi, a man of good reputation in the community, but who had recently converted to Christianity, was elected as the *Mangi* (chief). In this ‘invented’ position he was to assist the British authorities to administer the Temi area (cf. Maddox and Giblin 2006, 70–85; Iliffe 1979, 318–41).

Besides exercising political governance, some colonial officials also engaged in collecting cultural data about the various people groups under their jurisdiction. One journal that regularly published such historical, archaeological and anthropological articles about East African societies was *Tanganyika Notes and Records*.<sup>1</sup> It contains a number of articles about the Sonjo, their habitat, and especially the myths of Ghambageu which are of interest here.

To mediate the cultural and linguistic gap, local men were employed as translators and collectors of indigenous myths and local histories. The earliest account about the Sonjo people dates back to a 1940 article by J.E.S. Griffiths. He refers to the Sonjo as ‘an obscure agricultural-pastoral tribe of some two thousand five hundred souls’ and briefly describes their agricultural practices and settlement types (Griffiths 1940, 15). Griffiths’ report was limited to such rather superficial observations and made no mention of social structures, religious practices, or beliefs. The first account of Ghambageu appeared in a 1955 article by H.A. Fosbrooke (1955b, 38–42). Fosbrooke tells the story of Hambageu (sic) as it was related to him by Simeon Ndula, a Temi man who was employed as the Head Messenger by the Loliondo District Office.

In this account,<sup>2</sup> Ghambageu is portrayed as a stranger who roamed around the village of Tinaga and finally settled there, though without integrating himself in society. In fact, he refused to cooperate with other men to clean the water furrows. When even severe fines did not change Ghambageu’s behaviour, the village men decided to assassinate him; however, he was able to escape to Samunge (Soyeta) and find shelter among the people there. In Samunge he fathered many children, but eventually turned

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<sup>1</sup> TNR appeared first in March 1936 and changed its name to *Tanzania Notes and Records* after the country’s independence. Publication was stopped in 1985. The journal articles are available online under: <http://e-library.costech.or.tz/greenstone/cgi-bin>.

<sup>2</sup> For the full story, see Appendix 11.4.11

them into stones, except for two sons. After travelling across the country, he settled in Kisangiro (Raghari) where he finally died and was buried. When the people of Samunge heard about his death, they rushed to Kisangiro in order to exhume the corpse, only to find that the grave was empty. The report ends with a creed-like affirmation, that ‘from that day to this the whole country of Sonjo believes that Hambageu was God and is still God and will remain God’ (ibid. 41).

F.G. Finch developed the previous account of Sonjo beliefs by expanding on the story of Ghambageu and his sons (1957). Accordingly, Ghambageu’s sons, once they were turned into stones and distributed throughout the Sonjo area, constituted the places of worship. Finch reports how the elders ‘were positive that the stone was the god itself and not that the god merely inhabited the stone’ (ibid. 206). He must have witnessed how a temple hut in Mugongo was destroyed by a bushfire, and how the warriors tried to save the stones from destruction, that is, prevent the gods from being ‘killed’. Despite references to other divinities and religious celebrations, Finch maintains that ‘these rites in no way detract from the rituals of Hambageu himself. Far from it, they form an integral part in the religion of that god, who has his own special festivals and rites’ (ibid. 207).

A further interesting, psycho-analytical interpretation of Ghambageu’s character and his impact on Temi society is provided by E. Siemenauer (1955). He finds in Ghambageu distinct signs of a highly narcissistic personality who ‘exhibits decidedly passive character traits, and (an) avowed lack of co-operative spirit towards his fellow men, and seems to be interested only in his own person’ (ibid. 25). Ghambageu only loved his son Aka, in whom he recognized his own image. Siemenauer believes that

The Sonjo at once and instinctively recognized in Hambageu the personification of their hidden idol, investing him, by virtue of the projection mechanism of the soul, with their own repressed psychic tendencies, their hidden individualism, their forgotten attempt at unconformity, their original love of freedom from tribal coercion, their selfish traits, their longing for personal aggrandisement – in one word their narcissism (ibid. 28).

And Siemenauer continues to speculate that

The personality of Hambageu must have touched upon certain configurations of the structure of the collective soul of the Sonjo, and the impact of his being made resound in them a secret melody, one of the most ancient leitmotifs of mankind (ibid, 29).

The interaction between British colonial personnel and the Batemi may have been fleeting and without deeper inquiries into cultural matters, but there is no doubt that the most prominent attribute the observers characterized Temi society with was the figure

of Ghambageu. On the other hand, the Temi elders explicitly wanted the British to know that ‘the God Hambageu was known to, and worshipped by, the Wasonjo long before any Europeans entered his country, and long before any news of the existence of white men reached the Wasonjo country’ (Fosbrooke 1955b, 42). This representation of Temi religion and culture set the tone for later accounts, for example Robert Gray, who relied heavily on the myths collected by Fosbrooke and Finch.

### **4.3 Robert Gray’s anthropological view of Temi culture**

Robert Gray’s fieldwork among the Batemi coincided roughly with the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church in Butemine in the mid-1950s. Gray does not discuss the presence and mission activities of Christian churches in his major work (1974 [1963]). However, in his private correspondence he mentions Father Eugene Hillman’s arrival in Soyeta and his struggle to establish the first Catholic mission station among the Batemi (Gray 1955, 27 Sep). In these letters, he captures the cross-cultural conundrum of foreign and indigenous religions colliding, when he writes:

I hesitate to say how well the native Lutherans understand the doctrines of Christianity. They have certainly not completely abandoned their old pagan beliefs. I questioned a number of Christians during the recent pagan religious festival. None of them would go so far as to say that the sound of the horn was not the voice of Xambageu (sic). At most they equate Xambageu with the Devil – a powerful and dangerous being – but do not deny his existence. Some of the elders of Samunge seem to regret having allowed the Lutherans in, and now they want a Catholic mission, apparently in the hope that the two missions would cancel each other out (ibid. 22 Dec.).

Gray certainly had a more sophisticated understanding of Temi culture than the anthropologically untrained British officials. In terms of religious beliefs and practices, Gray unequivocally states that Sonjo religion ‘revolves around a culture hero named Khambageu who, according to general belief, performed miraculous acts, brought in a golden age of the Sonjo, was ultimately deified, and now dwells in heaven near the summit of Oldonyo Lengai mountain’ (Gray 1974 [1963], 11). He suggests that Ghambageu appeared on the scene at a time of severe crisis, possibly caused by Maasai raids, and through his leadership helped the Batemi to re-establish social and political order. As a consequence of his salvific action, people started hailing him as a supernatural being (ibid. 12-13).



In line with the ritual-enactment theories of E.B. Tylor and Eliade, Gray favoured Temi myths over rituals as guides to understanding Temi religion. Ritual action, he believed, merely confirms the validity of the myths (ibid. 97), although how they are linked up and support each other is not explained. Gray makes reference to the already quoted myth version by Fosbrooke which ‘appears fairly well standardized’ (ibid. 98), and ‘is accepted at all villages with only minor variations’ (ibid. 100). He also mentions creation myths, solar myths, and eschatological myths, but they are all eclipsed by the superior position of the Ghambageu narratives.

Gray does refer to Temi rituals – especially the *mbarimbari* and *mase* festival – as separate and singular events, rather disjointed from everyday domestic life (ibid. 108-120). While he admits that rites of passage such as birth, initiation, marriage, and death are ‘part of Sonjo religion’, they are considered to serve social functions rather than being part of the main Ghambageu cult (ibid. 108). The *mase* festival is described as a pious affair and a time of good moral behaviour when

... individuals must not only refrain from unseemly overt acts, such as scolding, laughing, or shouting, but they must also banish all thoughts or feelings of anger, hate, resentment, greed, envy, and the like, all of which are regarded as impious (ibid. 113).

According to Gray, the *mase* ceremony was dedicated to Ghambageu who came to visit each village in the course of a few weeks. The blast of a horn which rang out throughout the valley indicated the presence of Ghambageu among the people. Besides regular singing and dancing, there were specific times when people would bring their prayer requests and petitions to Ghambageu. Gray briefly describes the role of the priests and their subaltern position to the village elders. He speculates that it was the priests who were behind the manipulation of the horn of Ghambageu (ibid. 122).

Gray thus ascribes great powers to Sonjo religion; it is a conservative force that brings cohesion to Temi society by integrating the individual into the community, and aligns the otherwise autonomous villages into conformity (ibid. 124-128). He interprets the growing influence of the Ghambageu cult as being caused by a steady decline of earlier domestic cults (i.e. kin-based ancestral worship), and an adaptation to new ecological circumstances with an irrigation agriculture that required a centralized government. Temi religion is therefore cast as a belief system that is imposed as a collective consciousness and regulates people’s moral behaviour – as well as forming social and political structures.

Instead of further investigating indigenous religious practices, Gray calibrates Temi religion using Christian beliefs. In an article entitled '*Some Parallels in Sonjo and Christian Mythology*' (Gray 1966, 49–63), he points out seven features in these two belief systems that closely resemble each other. These are: 1) Supernatural birth of Ghambageu and Jesus, 2) Miracles of a compassionate nature, 3) Death following mistreatment by the people, 4) Ascent to heaven, 5) Post-mortem identification with God, 6) Salvation for the initiated, and 7) Eschatology (ibid. 59). Gray speculates that early Portuguese explorers or Coptic communities in Abyssinia could have transferred these Christian ideas to the Batemi, rather than a more recent contact with missionaries which the people would have remembered (ibid. 60).

In summary, Gray conceives Temi culture and religion as an overpowering ideology in which the individual member is but a passive agent with little capacity for significant decisions that could alter its nature. Furthermore, there is little regard for other aspects of Temi religion, for example how the Batemi *experience* religion, how it affects and shapes male and female identities, how people manipulate and coerce each other, or how it can be used for political purposes. His dependency on an earlier small collection of myths (e.g. Fosbrooke and Finch) which emphasizes the dominance of Ghambageu as religious leader, and the premature alignment of Temi and Christian beliefs, may have set a precedent for other outside investigators. Temi religion was seen as equivalent with a collective belief in Ghambageu, who appeared to be similar to Jesus in character, life history, and salvific significance for the Batemi. I am arguing that these assumptions are not only misleading, but also blocking a more heterogeneous understanding of the nature of Temi religion.

#### **4.4 The Lutheran Mission's approach**

The mission approach of the Lutheran church consisted not of one unison type, but presented a diversity according to the cultural and educational background of their missionaries. Among the Lutheran missionaries and missiologists were Tanzanians, Americans, and Europeans. Despite different nuances in their representation of Temi culture, all of them kept iterating the role of Ghambageu as the paramount God of the Batemi.

As outlined in chapter 3.6, the first concerted mission effort to reach the Batemi with the Gospel was undertaken by the Lutheran Church of Northern Tanganyika in 1948.<sup>3</sup> The elders of Samunge had agreed to the request to send Tanzanian missionaries into the Butemine area. However, after a promising start with numerous people joining the church, things turned against them:

There was also strong opposition, fostered by the secret society of Ghambageu, the god of the Sonjo. The worship of Ghambageu was controlled by a small number of men in the secret society. When the people of Samunge, and later of the other villages, said they wanted the Word of God, and the evangelists brought the Word of God, I do not believe the men in the secret society had any idea of the liberating power of that Word (Danielson 1977, 153).

In January 1952, one of the missionaries wrote in a letter:

Without a doubt these persons baptized the 20<sup>th</sup> of January are a foundation and key to others in Samunge and Sale because they are adults with their own houses and a good reputation in the Sonjo villages. They are Nginoria Koroi, Gami Kakamban, Ghuje Kitosi, Swara Kiranda, Kayalio Kambesi, and Saryano Ndeno. Swara, a woman, is given the name of Elizabethi. All these have been tested in many ways and cursed according to the Sonjo custom. Elders have prayed to Ghambageu and all other Sonjo gods that these gods might kill these new Christians. Also, the elders have had secret meetings night and day, and still meet, seeking how they might kill the Christians and catechumens, as it is their custom to kill every Sonjo who scorns their gods (ibid.).

All the same, it is more likely that the Temi elders were hurting because of the division the church brought to the village, and not because of the evangelists' pejorative attitude towards their gods. Their concern for the preservation of unity becomes clear in their appeal to the missionary:

Three times the village and court elders of Sonjo have come to Samunge for the purpose of making an agreement with me, that we should mix the Sonjo religion and the Christian religion and make one religion ... Every time they come I ask them why they want to mix their religion and ours. Their answer is that they don't want their village divided into two parts; Sonjo who aren't baptized and Sonjo Christians (ibid.).

In the end the church did not yield to the elders' request, and in a sense this set the tone in which the two groups were pitted against each other ever since. However, the one remarkable point is that from the very first contacts with the Batemi, the outside visitor (missionary or anthropologist) associated them with their god Ghambageu.

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<sup>3</sup> However, it is possible that there have been earlier mission expeditions into the Sonjo/Temi area before 1948. According to a personal communication with a veteran missionary from the African Inland Mission (AIM), groups of AIM missionaries visited the Sonjo from across the border in Kenya as early as 1928. Letters and reports documenting these activities have been handed over to the missions archive at Wheaton College, Illinois, in the United States.

Ghambageu became known as the god of their religion, the god they bring sacrifices to, and whom they worship.

The Lutheran Reverend Zakayo Rong'ola who worked among the Batemi in the 1970s presented his research findings in a paper entitled: 'The Theology and History of Temi religion'<sup>4</sup> (1976). He interrogated elders in order to find out the secret of Temi religion. As a native Mutemi, he was sympathetic rather than antagonistic towards his own people's beliefs and practices, as he compares favourably Temi religious behaviour with that of the Old Testament, and Ghambageu with Jesus Christ (ibid. 8). He lists the names of no less than 16 different Temi divinities, including the name of Ghambageu, who is 'the father of faith for the Batemi... just as the Christians call Abraham the father of faith and depend on him' (ibid. 30). In another section, Rong'ola sets up a comparison between the Christian and Temi notion of sin. While transgressions such as murder, theft, and adultery are indeed comparable evil, it is surprising that he lists the inter-marriage with a Muturi (a member of the blacksmith clan) as a sin (ibid. 90). According to Temi mythology, Ghambageu endowed the digging stick (*mulɔ*) exclusively to the Batemi and not to the Baturi (ibid.). Rong'ola concludes his study by surmising that each people may have their own beliefs in God – transmitted by their forefathers. The task of the church and the Christian missionary is to teach the Word of God, and educate these people to obey it. Eventually, the indigenous religion will decrease and disappear, while the Christian faith will increase and change societies (ibid. 95-104).

Another writer and observer of Temi culture is the Lutheran missiologist Mika Vähäkangas. In a number of articles and a book he purports Ghambageu as the central focus of Temi religion (2008b; 2006; 2014; 2008a). He compared Temi religion and Christianity as competing religious ideologies, and thereby noticed how Temi myths are rather flexible in content. He concluded that such changes in Temi myths occurred because the Temi elders wanted these stories to remain relevant in a changing world. More specifically, they intended the myths to be compatible with the Christian narratives of Jesus, so that there would be no reason for the Batemi to consider Jesus over Ghambageu (Vähäkangas 2008a, 100–114). The *benamijye*, according to this hypothesis, are using 'Jesus as a stepping stone to Ghambageu' (ibid. 109) in a process of appropriating Christian beliefs and images into their own religion. Moreover, by

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<sup>4</sup> In Swahili: Theologia ya dini ya kitemi (kisonjo) au historia ya dini ya kitemi

doing so, Temi religion is mutating from a polytheistic to a monotheistic religion. Engaging theorists like Durkheim and Bourdieu, Vähäkangas surmises that:

Among the Sonjo, totemic capital is mostly invested in Ghambageu, a central symbol or totem of the Sonjo community ... This political capital is used to introduce new inventions concerning Ghambageu. His is lifted ever higher and becomes an increasingly central figure in the Sonjo community. The list of epithets, functions, rituals and myths shifted to Ghambageu is perhaps too long to be complete, but some could be listed here: Son of the sun, Son of God, God, the giver of water rules, the founder of villages, his visitation of *mase*, his virgin birth, his return of the last day, and of course, the myths based on Christian parallels. In this way, Ghambageu has usurped the place and power of almost any other religious figure, human or god (2008a, 130).

Thus according to Vähäkangas, the battle between the adherents of the Temi traditional religion and the Christians is one of intellectual credibility (2008a, 135–36). The *benamijye* are consciously and strategically aiming to ‘absorb the Christian proclamation in order to transfer credibility from Jesus to Ghambageu’ (2008a, 134). The fact that the *benamijye* continue to be in charge as the political and religious leaders is taken as a sign of their successfully applied strategy. Thus Vähäkangas concludes:

The *wenamijie* (sic) institution has proved its vitality in the midst of changes through the utilisation of the Ghambageu figure in conserving the Sonjo ethnic identity ... the task of the *wenamijie* in conserving ethnic unity and identity will not become easier. For the sake of the Sonjo, it is to be hoped that the *wenamijie* government officials and church leaders understand the great responsibility they have, especially to the fragile environment where the fountains pump life into the veins of communities located in a dry area. Be it Ghambageu or Jesus, ethnic or national unity, the whole existence of the Sonjo is at risk of extinction together with the traditional way of life unless the community is led through these social changes in a responsible and orderly way (2008a, 150).

The account Vähäkangas provides us with is somewhat vexing. First of all, he provides only a partial account of Temi religious life, much of which is based on hearsay reports and questionable data.<sup>5</sup> Although he accredits the Temi elders with the power to act as self-conscious and autonomous agents (rather than passive subjects who are at the mercy of modernity sweeping over them), the way he is using their voices in support of his own fabrication is not convincing. Furthermore, the entire logic is based on the premise that religion consists primarily in man’s beliefs, and moreover, beliefs that are under his manageable control.

Among the local constituency there were other voices which understood that the issue was not a debate about orthodoxy, but about engaging and accessing different sources of identity. Gabriel Goroi who was among the first Temi Christians was one of

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<sup>5</sup> (cf. Derungs 2011)

them. His dissent from *gitemi* traditions and subsequent clashes with fellow age-mates and village elders was not about different doctrines of belief, but about his refusal to ‘follow in the footsteps of the ancestors’. There were also attempts to translate the Lutheran liturgy and the Gospel books into Gitemi (e.g. Gabriel Goroi’s brother Samuel was a gifted translator), but with little success of inserting Gitemi as a vernacular into the church.

Today, the Lutheran church has a presence in all Temi villages, although there is only one ordained pastor for the entire area who resides in Samunge. The church is well organized with regular church meetings, a structured liturgy, and highly motivated Temi evangelists who meet on a weekly basis. By far the majority of church members are women and children with only a handful of adult men. Even if young men join the church, in the long run they return to their indigenous religious practices once they reach old age.

#### **4.5 Roman Catholic mission approach**

In contrast to the Lutheran mission approach which attempted to communicate Christianity via a comparison of beliefs (Temi myths and biblical narratives), the Roman Catholic Church contextualised the Gospel by transforming indigenous into Christian symbols. Although there were other Catholic missionaries working among the Batemi, the person selected here is Vincent Donovan, since he provides us with the most useful data (Bowen and McLaren 2011; Donovan 2003). Donovan was a deeply committed believer, as well as a creative thinker, and capable communicator. During his engagement with the Batemi (and previously with the Maasai), he wrestled in a self-critical and illuminating way about the meaning of the church, missions, priesthood, sacraments, and human life in its different cultural expressions. He was trying to come to terms with the role and form of the church in Africa, as well as the form and content of the Gospel as it is transmitted to the people of Africa.

It has already been mentioned that Donovan failed to reach the elders of Ebwe with the Gospel after having instructed them at regular intervals for an entire year (chapter 3). Nevertheless, a month later he reports of a baptismal service along one of the water canals:

I stooped down and scooped water out of the flowing furrow with a drinking bowl, then stood up and poured the water over the head of the first Sonjo standing in line along the furrow, “I baptize you ...” Shortly afterwards, when the last girl had been anointed, with the oil dripping down unto her nose and into her eyes, we moved over to the sacred fig tree and squatted down in its comfortable shade around a goatskin that had been spread out to serve as altar (Bowen and McLaren 2011, 178).

Donovan did not simply look for a mechanical analogy between Temi culture and the Bible through which he could make the people understand what the Gospel was all about. He genuinely admired and loved the people and their culture, he called them ‘a beautiful people, happy and content’ (Bowen and McLaren 2011, 150). In an implicit reference to Roland Allen’s book ‘Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?’ (Allen 2011 [1962]) he states his belief that God was there with the Sonjo before he himself ever arrived there (ibid. 150). In his conversations with the elders, Donovan let them know that he had no intention of abolishing their religious institution, he told them that:

It was well known that the Sonjo were men of great piety and religion. That is why I had come to them. I had not come to denounce or to rail against that religion, or to ask them to cast away the things that were familiar to them or to deny the knowledge of God which they had. I had come to add to it, and perhaps to bring new meaning to it (ibid. 138).

In another teaching session with the elders, he goes even further in his identification of the Christian with the Temi God by declaring:

This *Khambageu* whom you worship – I know him. I make bold to say I know more about him than you do – what he means for you and for me. I, together with all those who believe in him, call him Christ. And that resurrection of his has meaning for you and me, for our lives and for our world that you have not even begun to dream about. That resurrection, when he became the Lord, and burst through into a new kind of existence, is like a great hope that has dawned on our world (ibid. 163).

What Donovan hoped to achieve was to capture the elders’ curiosity, to touch on some element in their own belief that would trigger an interest in Christianity. He was convinced that Ghambageu, their god, and Jesus Christ shared a similar role in the respective religion, and that the beliefs must be compatible if one only thought things through. In Donovan’s summary of what the Gospel is all about,<sup>6</sup> he did not start with the concept of sin, nor did he mention the church as an institution, because of considerations toward Temi beliefs, so as not to confuse the listeners. The summary thus went like this:

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Years and years of honest effort at trying to distill the meaning of the Christian message and to arrive at the essence of Christianity had gone into the preparation of that speech. In truth, I had been preparing for more than ten years for that meeting under the fig trees of Sonjo’ (2011, 140).

Part One: The news of the most High God, the kind God, the creator; the immanent God. The human race is one. God has never forgotten any nation. All nations can find God. All are called to share in his kingdom. All who do right are acceptable to God. Salvation is promised to all.

Part Two: Jesus Christ, God and man, went about doing good. Without guilt he suffered and died. The third day he was raised up by God without tasting corruption, and was seen by witnesses. Through his resurrection Jesus is made the Lord. He ascended.

Part Three: What must we do? We must believe and be baptized. The Spirit is promised. We must go forth in the Spirit to witness. We must repent. Forgiveness of sins is now possible through faith in Christ. Judgment is fixed. Christ will come again (ibid. 184).

Another aspect in which Donovan differed from the Lutheran or Pentecostal mission approach was the question of conversion. He understood that it was unhealthy for the church and the village community to ‘save’ individuals and bring them into the church.

Evangelization is not the same thing as convert-making or proselytizing. It is not a work addressed to an individual or to individuals. Rather, it is an exposing of a people to the gospel, an opening up of a section of the world to the power and possibilities of the gospel. It is the inviting of sometimes unpredictable responses to the gospel message. It does not consist in predetermining those responses as convert-making does. It is a work which calls for a new attitude towards the gospel, and an almost frightening openness to it (ibid. 173).

Donovan was concerned with the Batemi as a group, as a culture, and not interested in the conversion of a few who would then be ostracised from the community. At another instance he says: ‘We missionaries are not merchants of individual salvation’ (ibid. 138). He also expected the local church to produce mature believers who would carry the Gospel to others within the community.

So that ‘the powers and possibilities of the Gospel’ would come to fruition, the local (Donovan used the term *pagan*) god should not be derided if

... we ever expect these pagan cultures to be ready and willing to make the contribution that they can make to Christianity, which they must make if the Church is to be really catholic – that revelation of God, that chapter in the history of salvation which they alone can tell us (ibid. 150-51).

Donovan thus expected a transformation of indigenous into Christian traditions which would render a new and unprecedented expression of the meaning of the Christian faith. He was looking for revelation *from* the Batemi (ibid. 151), rather than imposing a universal doctrine onto them. This is a similar notion as suggested by Andrew Walls who speaks of a necessity of Christian diversity because of the cultural limitations that hamper our understanding of the Gospel (1996, 43–54). However,



Donovan expected his and the Batemi's horizon to be enlarged through a growing church which finds its own, culturally determined, faith.

One such authentic expression of Temi Christianity is recorded as the composition of the Sonjo Creed. Donovan said that the community asked for his assistance in writing this creed, but it is more likely that this sprung up in his mind.<sup>7</sup> The creed went like this:

We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it. God loves the world, and he loves our tribe as he loves every tribe on the earth. He has promised that he will save the world and all the tribes of the earth. We have known this High God in the darkness, and now we know him in the light. He is not far from us.

We believe that God fulfilled his promise by sending his son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village, who went about doing good, curing people by the power of God, teaching that the true meaning of religion is love, who was rejected by his people, tortured, nailed hands and feet to a cross and died. He lay buried in the grave, but was not touched by hyenas, and on the third day, he rose again. Now he has the power to rule and save his world and make it new.

We believe that through Jesus we stand together truly before the face of God and need no one else to stand there for us. And that all our sins are forgiven through him. All who have faith in him must be sorry for their sins, be baptized in the Holy Spirit, live as the brotherhood of love, share the bread together in love to announce the good news to others until Jesus comes again. We are waiting for him. He is alive. He lives. This we believe. Amen (ibid. 186-87).

Donovan called it the Gospel 'clothed in African garb' (ibid. 151). It is basically the same creed he had used as the African Creed in his book *Christianity Rediscovered* (2003, 200). A closer examination of this creed betrays Donovan's limited understanding of Sonjo/Temi culture. For example, the Batemi bury their dead, they do not leave a corpse out in the bush for the hyenas. It looks like he had devised this creed beforehand when working with the Maasai, and applied it now to the Temi church. The word for cross used in Gitemi is simply a tree, since the Batemi are not familiar with the idea of an execution on a cross. Finally, it would be interesting to know what words were used for 'God', 'Holy Spirit', 'save/salvation', 'love', 'baptism', and 'sin'. These are all culturally foreign (or in the case of 'God', different) concepts. However, these words are all interlinked with larger domains, and there is a string of other associations attached to each term.

Donovan thus saw the Batemi as unique group of people who required their own evangelization approach. According to Donovan, they needed to be reached as a collective group, not as individual converts, if the Gospel should ever make a difference in their lives. He was ready to learn about their culture as much as he could, but there

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<sup>7</sup> Bowen remarks in a footnote that according to Father Kohler, a colleague of Donovan's, Donovan was in fact the primary author of this document (2011, 186).

were limits to such inquiries which he could not overcome. While he was volunteered various versions of the myths of Ghambageu, any query about *mase* was denied to him:

A Sonjo, who was trying to be friendly, said to me one day, “Padre, learn all you can and want about the stories of the Sonjo. Everyone will be glad to tell you all you want to hear. But do not ever try to enter into or interfere with, or find out about the meaning of Mase (ibid. 135).

Donovan eventually did learn more about the *mase* ceremony, but he concluded with disgust that it was:

Shabby and shoddy, deceitful, treacherous, dishonest and somehow unworthy of the Sonjo. Here, to me, was an indication that if these people were indeed the struggling remnants of a primitive paradise, it was of a paradise that was forever lost (ibid. 135).

Donovan found people’s activities during *mase* paradoxical and not in tune with his previous experiences with them. He could not reconcile the peaceful and loving people he knew with this shocking behaviour. It is, therefore, not surprising that Donovan’s attention was turned away from their opaque practices, to concentrating on their belief in God. Surely, this would be more promising. In a conversation with the elders, Donovan urged them to expand their idea of God, so that he would not just be their tribal god, but the God of all people. He said:

Free your God to become the High God ... He is the God not only of the Sonjo, but also my God, and the God of the Maasai and the Kikuyu, and the God of every tribe and nation in the world (ibid. 142).

One elder asked Donovan if he had found the God he was talking about, and after reflecting for a while, he answered:

No! We have not found that High God, not even those of us who have been sent to tell you about him. We have not known him. But we believe that he exists, and we have a certainty about that belief. I have come to ask you to join me. Let us search for him together. One day we may find him. The story of Abraham speaks to all of us (ibid. 143).

In 1973 Donovan returned to his home community in the United States and never returned to Tanzania. The book *Christianity Rediscovered* in which he wrote about his experience on the mission field living among the Maasai and the Sonjo became a bestseller. Donovan’s approach to mission was unconventional and even revolutionary,

and his innovative thinking is still thought-provoking today.<sup>8</sup> More than four decades later, his legacy is still passed on in mission circles and his ideology keeps having an impact on missionaries and mission theologians (Bowen 2009).

However, the effect of Donovan's strategy among the Maasai and the Batemi is open to different interpretations. Some observers think that the strategy failed because it was not practical or sustainable, especially because of the problem of conferring priesthood to Maasai men which proved to be an obstacle for the Roman Catholic Church (Bowen and McLaren 2011, 209). Other close collaborators with Donovan are more optimistic about the heritage Donovan left behind. Pat Patten, a Spiritan missionary who arrived the year in which Donovan left, believes the Gospel planted by Donovan (and others) can be seen by the stories people tell each other, for example the story of the Good Samaritan. Patten illustrates this by recalling a Maasai who had brought a badly wounded Ndorobo (a group that is opposed to the Maasai) to the hospital:

The doctor was able to save the man's life, but then asked the Maasai: 'So why did you bring this man?' – because, you know, in Maasai tradition, someone who's that badly hurt will be left outside the village for the hyenas to eat; and this guy was not a Maasai, he was a Ndorobo ... And the Maasai elder said, 'Well, that is the way the story goes.' And the doctor says, 'What do you mean? What story?' And the man says, 'I am not sure I remember it right. But it is something like this: there was this guy who was beaten up by thieves and people from his own ethnic group kept passing him by. So we had to bring him' (ibid. 214).

#### **4.6 Pentecostal confrontations with Temi culture**

The early 1980s saw a third movement of Christian churches in the Butemine area when evangelical churches joined the established Lutheran and Roman Catholic Church in the competition of making Temi converts. The first evangelicals were from the Free Pentecostal Church of Tanzania (FPCT) who started to hold small evangelistic meetings in Ebwe and attracted attention among young men and women. With their administrative headquarters in Loliondo and Arusha, they installed a pastor in Ebwe

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<sup>8</sup> Steven Bevans acknowledged the influence Donovan's book had on his thinking on mission theology (Bevans 2015).

who was overseeing the church activities in the entire Temi area. Pastor Albert Masando, the son of *mwenamijye* Masando Sediyya, came under severe social pressure by the Ebwe elders and his age-mates who made several attempts to kill him because of his dissent from *gitemi* ways.<sup>9</sup> Other evangelical churches eventually followed the FPCT (Tanzanian Assemblies of God, Evangelical Assemblies of God, Great Commission Church of Tanzania, and recently the Baptist Church). Most of them are clustered in close vicinity of each other in Ebwe and Mugholo. There is a certain attitude of high-handedness in the leadership of these churches; they seem to intentionally ignore the work and presence of other churches. A significant difference between the Pentecostal and the more established denominations (i.e. Roman Catholic and Lutheran) is their less rigorous administration and supervision. Due to its isolated situation, the Pentecostal clergy exercise their authority without much accountability towards their supervisors who may reside far away and seldom visit the Temi area. This relative freedom has led some evangelical pastors to misuse the church as a platform for their own personal aspiration to the detriment of the church community. Pentecostal pastors have minimal, if any pastoral training or even secondary education, and in recent years there has been an increase of feuds among these rivalling churches which has left many members disillusioned.<sup>10</sup> Within a social context that does not offer much opportunity for professional development for people with little educational background, the church provides an opportunity to gain social capital, exercise authority over others, and have the chance of a livelihood. The fact that most people are illiterate, with very limited knowledge of the Christian creeds and traditions puts the church at risk to manipulation and corruption. Once people have come under the charge of a pastor, he is able to put them under moral pressure to abide by his rules and oblige his plans.

The theology of these evangelical churches emerges out of an unstructured, often impressionistic reading of the Bible (cf. Dube and West 2000; Mwombeki 2001; West 2002; Coertze 2008; Gifford 2008). They stress personal salvation and spiritual experiences which include speaking in tongues and ecstatic convulsions.<sup>11</sup> Pentecostal Christians perceive Lutherans and Catholics as *nominal* believers, that is, they are not

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<sup>9</sup> Interview: Masando 8 Nov 2001

<sup>10</sup> One TAG (Tanzania Assemblies of God) pastor recommended his brother to be put in charge as a pastor (although he had a questionable character); this brother was caught by the police in an attempted hold-up robbery and jailed. An FPCT (Free Pentecostal Church of Tanzania) pastor who committed adultery continued to head a church, although the congregation gradually deserted him.

<sup>11</sup> These are observations made when we attended church services in various evangelical churches.

‘saved’ but just followers of *dini* (religion). Sermon texts are mostly taken from narrative passages which feature conflicts with religious authorities (e.g. Jesus and the Pharisees, or Moses opposing the Pharaoh), and ‘spiritual warfare’ (e.g. Jesus casting out demons). Preaching from these texts, and essentially re-narrating them, alludes to the corresponding spiritual battle the Temi Christians face against the adherents of traditional practices. The preachers generally do not make direct reference to *gitemi*, or use the vernacular names like *bagwe*, *benamijye*, *ghorowane* etc. during a sermon – maybe out of fear of some supernatural retribution – but the meaning is communicated clearly enough.

Another major distinction between the Pentecostal and the older churches is the ethnic identity of the clergy. While the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Church have always had outsiders as priests or pastors tending over local communities, the Pentecostal churches have Temi pastors. These local men, often untrained but with a fervent commitment to the Gospel message, perceive Temi religion not primarily as a belief system, but as a tradition of ‘evil practices’, and of ‘devil worship’. They have first-hand experience of the social and spiritual dynamics of Temi initiation, the Kirimo ritual and its moral rules, and by having become Christians, they completely disassociated themselves from these practices. What the Pentecostal pastors oppose and refute is not stories or beliefs of Ghambageu, but religious occult practices, especially the *mase* celebration. It is not uncommon for clashes between members of Pentecostal churches and groups of *batana* (members of the warrior age set) to occur during a *mase* celebration.<sup>12</sup>

The main point here is not whether the Temi myths have been influenced by earlier contacts with Christianity (which is always a possibility), but why everybody honed in on the Batemi’s beliefs, rather than their religious practices. Religion, it is assumed, is the belief in the supernatural, a god, spirit, possibly ancestors (Horton 1967; Horton 1964). However, such a definition obviates the possibility of alternative models of religious worlds, while the researcher pounces on the first corresponding similarity with his own experience that is offered.

The fact that the Temi elders readily offer the narratives of their sacred god to strangers (while being secretive about other aspects of their culture) should have been a clue that what was presented were entertaining stories, not a revelation of the true face

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<sup>12</sup> NB SG 8 Nov 2014

of their 'religion', source of power, nor how it is organized. As with other African traditional religions, deep knowledge about their beliefs and practices is absorbed over long periods – sometimes a lifetime – and that is how such knowledge is incorporated into people's being. As a result of having obtained it through a slow process, it is guarded carefully. Thus, as Knighton remarks, 'the religious specialists are not likely to throw their pearls before swine, so very few younger members grasp a conceptual overview of their religion' (1999, 121). If this is the case, then how likely is it that a stranger should get access to the religious knowledge that defines a people? Even without the support of the presented data in this thesis, it was highly unlikely that Ghambageu was the epitome of their religious world.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter summarized the primary traits by which outsiders characterized the Batemi, the most striking being the predominance of their religious belief in Ghambageu. A closer examination of Temi culture, however, reveals a much more complex cultural scope than is provided in these unidimensional descriptions. Beginning with chapter five and through chapter eight, I point out those cultural features that emerged through my research engagement which point toward a different centre of gravity of Temi culture, and which have received little attention in previous ethnographic accounts.



## Chapter 5

### 5. THE *ETONGO* AND ITS SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR TEMI SOCIETY

*Bobyo monto mulakolo abaghayya maara, n'esubusubela.*

Old men make a place stable. (Gitemi saying)

#### 5.1 Introduction

The village council (*etongo*) is a natural place to start describing Temi culture because it is within this group of elders that so much of their culture converges and interconnects. The *benamijye*<sup>1</sup> are not only the acknowledged experts and custodians of *gitemi* (the Temi customary law) – but because they represent the seat of jurisdiction, control the distribution of irrigation water and allow access to wildlife in the wilderness – many Batemi consider them the driving force behind the ongoing vitality of *gitemi*. However, while the elders' view of *gitemi* customary law is significant, it does not represent everybody's view of how *gitemi* should be practised. There is no such monolithic concept of *gitemi*, although people may like to believe so. Rather, there are different – sometimes contradicting – views and voices that interpret *gitemi* according to their socio-political affiliation, gender, and age-group membership. Furthermore, as has been pointed out in my methodology,<sup>2</sup> the question asked here is not just how meaning is encoded in spatial arrangements, social structures, ritual behaviour, or myths, but how social interactions *produce* meaning and maintain coherence of *gitemi* by linking it to the people's past.

In this chapter I address the historical origin of the *etongo* and the socio-political fabric in which it is embedded. I also discuss the mythical origin from which the *benamijye* derive their political mandate and the practices associated with their office. Today the socio-political position of these elders is increasingly jeopardized because of rapid changes in their social world – brought about through advances of governance policies of the Tanzanian state, more education, and the presence of churches and

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<sup>1</sup> *Benamijye* is a compound word which, literally, means the 'owners of the village'.

<sup>2</sup> See 1.8 Theoretical considerations and reflexivity.



mosques – all of which seemingly make the existence of the elders' leadership antiquated and obsolete. I will illustrate some of these modern challenges and show how the *benamijye* respond to them with some case studies.

## 5.2 Hospitality and hostility - creating oneself through the other

The Batemi's tradition of providing hospitality to strangers differs from the way a guest is typically treated by a modern Tanzanian family. In the latter case, a host takes great pride in the care of a visitor; to host a visitor and share a meal with another person is associated with honour and considered a blessing for the house. In contrast to this custom, a visitor arriving in a Temi village is first of all eyed with suspicion. Typically the first steps in such an encounter are to identify the visitor and ask the visitor to state the purpose of the visit. This task is performed by the visitor's corresponding age-group.<sup>3</sup> The leaders of the age-set (*bekorani*) will appoint two or three age-mates who are responsible for hosting and feeding the visitor for the duration of his visit. This courtesy is extended even to Maasai visitors – as long as they come in good faith and state their business clearly. The *bekorani* will then inform the *benamijye* of the visitor's arrival and explain the nature of his business. If the elders' counsel or approval is needed for resolving a matter, they are ready to convene a meeting at any time to discuss the matter.

The Batemi are not xenophobic in the sense that they loathe or even hate strangers, but they admit that they are 'afraid of people and things they do not know'.<sup>4</sup> Pointing out the distinct characteristics of other ethnic groups is one way by which the Batemi construct their own identity. For example, the word for Maasai, *bēegōbi*, also means 'enemy' in Gitemi. The Batemi think of the Maasai as dirty (*bantu baghundagu*) and bad (*babejagu*). Temi men poke fun at the way the Maasai circumcise their boys, leaving a remaining piece of foreskin on the penis.<sup>5</sup> People from other Bantu groups are

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<sup>3</sup> It is normally men who travel. Maasai women who come to visit the *mase* ceremony are accompanied by men. Today, with increased mobility and the option of staying in local guesthouses the customary hosting etiquette and the protocol of informing the elders about the arrival of visitors has of course changed. Nevertheless, the elders still expect to be notified about the movements of people within the territory of their village.

<sup>4</sup> Rec: Henrise 17 Feb 2010

<sup>5</sup> Other nicknames for the Maasai are *lasyelagi* (weakling, lightweight), *badaba* (those who snatch people), and *ba ngi jya bituru* (those with flies on the shoulders).

called *basyomba* (the Swahili), thus grouping them as a generic assembly in contrast to Temi distinctiveness from them. The Batemi do this while knowing perfectly well that other people also have their own culturally distinct customs.

The theme of hospitality is touched upon here because it has several implications in the further discussion. Taking for example the legendary story of Ghambageu – who arrived as a stranger among the Batemi and was provided with shelter and later apotheosed into a hero-god – I am asking the question about the reason which led an apparently conservative society to invite a stranger and elevate him to such a prominent leadership position in their culture. Furthermore, the topic of hospitality also has bearings on how the Temi culture can possibly provide ways of appropriating the Christian Gospel into already existing cultural patterns, i.e. the question of how Christ can be ‘incarnated’ into the life-world of the Batemi (Ross 2008; Arias 1982; cf. Sutherland 2010).

Judging from the observation the anthropologist Gray made in 1955, the Batemi’s attitude towards outsiders has not significantly changed during the last 60 years when he reports that:

The Sonjo have no tradition of hospitality to strangers. During the annual religious festival, Masai (and presumably other tribes) are welcomed provided they bring offerings of goats to the Sonjo God, but there are no foreigners permanently settled in the country. One such foreigner, Saidi Omari ... was living here when we first arrived but left soon thereafter. After seven years he decided that life in Sonjo was socially unbearable. His buildings and well-developed fields, which were sold for a song, are crumbling away and reverting to the condition of ordinary Sonjo shambas (Gray 1955, 7; 22 Dec 1955).

And just before wrapping up his fieldwork he ends a report about the Sonjo people in the following way:

I do not want to give the impression that the Sonjo are surly. They are lively people who laugh and sing a great deal. Left to themselves their lives seem to be happy and full, troubled only by the hunger periods which occur in the frequent years of low rainfall. Superficially they are polite and friendly with strangers. At a deeper level they are uncommunicative realizing that their highly integrated culture is threatened by the outside world. They are not yet ready to meet this challenge openly. Instead they have tried to avoid it by turning their faces to the past, intensifying their archaic ritual activity by becoming morbidly conservative (Gray 1955, *ibid.*).

Gray’s diagnosis of an *uncommunicative* people deserves some further comments because it touches on a crucial point in anthropological research in general, and this study in particular. What in Gray’s eyes looked like a refusal to share the deeper level of

Temi culture – and I argue this throughout the thesis – lies less in an attitude of unwillingness to disclose indigenous knowledge to an outsider,<sup>6</sup> but in the very nature of how the Batemi experience their world, namely in a mode which stores knowledge of their world in *habitual* dispositions instead of mere cognitive information. Rather than theorizing about their culture, the Batemi *engage* with the objects in their world, e.g. their physical surroundings such as their fields, the springs, the water canals, the sacrifices, the tools and equipment they use, and of course with each other. For them, it is the ‘readiness-to-hand’ (Heidegger’s *Zuhandenheit*) which reveals the true nature of these objects, or of other people in their world (Jackson 2012a, 171). This means that while Temi people converse about their culture, like telling you the sequential processes of a *ghorou* (ritual or ceremony), they are less likely able to explain the *meaning* of their actions in conceptual language which we would associate with concepts such as ‘religion’, ‘ritual’ or ‘beliefs’. Ultimately, the purpose and meaning of ceremonies are implicit in, and made known through, performance rather than an aftermath interpretation (Moore, Sanders, and Kaare 2004, 15; Jackson 2012b, 51–71; Richards 2013). To the Batemi the meaning of a Temi ritual is self-evident in its efficacy, that is, the produced results. For instance, a new generation, an age-set of men, is the desired and predictable outcome of the elaborate initiation process. The mystery of this transformation – and there are mysterious things going on during these rituals – does not strike them as problematic, or a ‘problem to be solved’.<sup>7</sup> When describing how the Temi person is constituted through the initiation process, Schäfer (1999c) points out several times how the men’s relationship to the transcendent divinity (Kirimo) as well as their own male identity remains ‘unspeakable’ (in German: *unsagbar*) and thus eludes explicit verbalization.

In terms of the percentage of strangers residing in the Temi area the situation today is not much different from the 1950s. The few government employees (section and ward administrators, teachers and medical personnel) and Christian pastors remain the outsiders. During Pastor Masapila’s miracle-cure hype in 2011, dozens of young Tanzanian men from other areas arrived to try their fortune with small-scale enterprises

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<sup>6</sup> It is generally the case that important knowledge about cultural practices is not spilled out to everyone, but carefully retained by the few who are trusted guardians of specialized knowledge; these people are typically the elders of a community.

<sup>7</sup> Here we can learn from Wittgenstein who insisted that ‘even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical’ (Jackson 2012a, 172).

like motor-bike shops, providing transportation with motor-bikes and cars, or working as construction hands. When the rush of people seeking Masapila's help subsided, some of these young men settled in Butemine. In recent years, gold and gemstone mining has attracted artisan miners to the villages of Mugongo and Soyeta. Young men are working in hand-driven shafts, using simple hand-tools in their search for precious stones. Nevertheless, the overall number of non-Temi in the area is less than 100.<sup>8</sup>

### 5.3 The origins of the *etongo* and its socio-political structure

The purpose of the following section is to explain the structures and the workings of the *etongo* as a social institution, and, as far as possible, to shed light on its historical origin. By doing so I hope to gain a platform for discussing some of the changes that the present political leadership is undergoing and what the future of the *etongo* may possibly look like. Casting the *etongo* as an institution that is contingent on historical processes reveals its strength and its limitations. The *etongo* governance system was an effective instrument to promote a moral ideology which provided social cohesion in a small-scale society like that of the Batemi, but will it be able to continue to do so with the advance of alternate modes of governance that the nation-state, the church, or modern education are offering?

In their collection of essays about African de-centralized political systems, Middleton and Tait pointed out how difficult it was 'to discover the means by which relations of government, both external and internal to various component groups of the society, are instituted and sanctioned' (Middleton 1958, 6). The theoretical context in which social and political power is analysed has since shifted, with an explosion of studies around the question of *how* power is exercised and *where* it is located (cf. Arens and Karp 1989; Ellis and Haar 2004; Clegg and Haugaard 2009; Cheater 1999; Haugaard 2002; Lukes 1974; Faubion 1994). However, the question of how power 'works' in particular cultural contexts still remains puzzling today. I argue that within Temi society, power is not *per se* located with the *benamijye* or their political position

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<sup>8</sup> Over the years we got to know a number of teachers, hospital employees, and pastors who lived and worked in Ebwe. They all expressed in one way or another how difficult it was to integrate into Temi society. The few cross-cultural marriages of people living in Butemine broke up because the women could not cope with the social constraints.

as members of the *etongo*, but that it is masked by the symbolic capital which they – as the mediators between the ancestral world and the community – represent through their long-term experience and knowledge of *gitemi*, and that, furthermore, power is exercised within the relationship the *benamijye* entertain with the age-set leaders and the village commoners. Moreover, the Batemi do not perceive power as being the prerogative of the *benamijye* but as something that is distributed among other social institutions like the age-set and clan leadership, and distinct mature female leaders in the village. Lastly, power and its valid exercise is contingent on the cultural context in which social action takes place. The question of who is entitled to exercise power and under what circumstances is therefore dependent on the ability of men and women to grasp the social context and regress on implicit cultural values which best resolve the problem at hand. These values (which the Batemi simply call *gitemi*) are the result of a long enculturation process that is based on body discipline, imitation of ritual actions, and teaching by various kinship groups. Routine discipline and learning eventually form a distinct Temi habitus that gives each individual a spontaneous, non-reflexive ability to quickly assess different social contexts and the social skills to act appropriately in them (cf. Bourdieu 1992, 54).

According to oral traditions, the council of the *benamijye* was inaugurated by Ghambageu himself. Each village entertains its own version of how Ghambageu assembled men (mostly there were eight) and how he instructed them in their new task. Here is how Masando Sediyya of Ebwe narrated the beginning of the first village council:

Where do the *benamijye* come from? *Benamijye* started in Raghari. The one who started it was Ghambageu. He went from Soyeta to Raghari and lived with the people there. After a while he got sick, but he only pretended to be sick. He asked them to find eight elders. When they came to him he said: ‘*Balome* (men), I am sick and I feel that I am about to die. If I die, do not take off my bracelet, but you will cut me some leather sandals.’ But before they cut the sandals, he fell down and died. They still made him some sandals and put them on his feet. They dug the grave and buried him. When they finished burying him, they consulted each other. ‘*Balome*, now we buried a Mugwe (god) with a bracelet. Let us dig him up again and remove the bracelet.’ When they did so they found that the bracelet was gone. This is how the *benamijye* started here in Butemine. The meaning is that each village has eight elders; it is those *benamijye* whom Ghambageu has called. The *benamijye* started in Raghari, in Kura, Eroghata, Soyeta and Ebwe, and Gheeri. But these eight elders continued to draw others until they were many like today.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rec: Masando Sediyya 7 June 2010 Ebwe

The bracelet is a symbol of authority worn by *benamijye* and *baghərəwane* (the priests). Leather sandals are given to the neophytes during the initiation ritual by their maternal uncles (*maama*). Other versions of Ghambageu's death state that he was resurrected and rose to be united with the sun. The story further served as corroboration of the similarities between Christian and Temi beliefs (cf. Bowen and McLaren 2011, 162–63) or at least to emphasize the remarkable resemblance between the two (Gray 1966). In contrast to Donovan who claimed that 'every Sonjo child knows the story of Khambageu, his life, work, death, and resurrection' (Bowen and McLaren 2011, 162), the narratives around Ghambageu are far less common today. Schäfer quotes stories about the origin of the *etəngə* institution<sup>10</sup> with further details about these events and also about the social rules Ghambageu commanded the chosen elders to observe:

At that time, while Ghambageu was living in Raghari, he had a companion named Sarakisi, a young man, with whom he grazed the goats. Ghambageu appeared as a young man, although he was much older. When they played together, Ghambageu saw that Sarakisi had an iron chain around his waist. Ghambageu asked for the chain, and Sarakisi gave it to him. Later, it began to rain and the stream flooded. Ghambageu was carried away by the flood, and Sarakisi returned home with the herds alone.

Sarakisi became old, and he remained in Raghari. He never saw Ghambageu again. But one day Ghambageu returned, taking on the appearance of an old man, and came to Sarakisi's house. Sarakisi did not recognize him. The next day, on the spot where Ghambageu had sat, was a pot of honey. When Ghambageu came to Sarakisi's house again, he asked him whether he had found the honey-pot. Then he asked whether Sarakisi recognized him. He did not. Then Ghambageu gave him the iron chain back, and gave him a new name according to the chain 'Bamisimiliyani.' Ghambageu explained that he was the one who had herded goats with Sarakisi as a boy and who had been drowned. Sarakisi asked him why he was returning to Raghari at a time of hunger, when the only food was soup made from old bones. Ghambageu answered, 'Then let us eat old bones.' As the soup was cooking, Ghambageu told the woman to take the bones out of the pot with wooden sticks, even though one normally only used these sticks for a meat soup. When the bones came out of the broth, they were full of meat. Ghambageu told the woman to give the meat to the children. He himself did not want any meat, but asked for the honey-pot. Sarakisi had someone get the pot. Ghambageu said that as an old man, he could only eat the honey if it were made into beer. Ghambageu asked for enough honey to make beer with and put it in a calabash. Then an old man brought honey beer, but Ghambageu wanted the beer from the honey he had brought. Sarakisi asked his wife if she had water. When she said 'no', Ghambageu pulled up the central pillar of the house and water sprung up. Ghambageu told the woman to fill her container.

The beer could now be brewed. After it was done, Sarakisi asked Ghambageu to taste it. But Ghambageu told him to invite his neighbour, and asked his name. The neighbour's name was Ganyawa. When Ganyawa arrived, Ghambageu asked him whether he had a friend from the other half of the village. When Ganyawa came, Ghambageu asked him whether he had a friend in the other half of the village. Ganyawa answered that he had a friend named Nabunya who came from the other side of the village. When Nabunya came, Ghambageu asked him to call a friend from the other side of the village. This friend's name was Medau, and he too was called.

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<sup>10</sup> These stories were collected by Pastor Klaus-Peter Kiesel in the 1980s and recorded in Kiswahili. In contrast to the oral stories I recorded and present in this thesis, Schäfer's narratives have clearly been polished up by making the sentences coherent and adding background information for the benefit of the reader unfamiliar with the culture.

Ghambageu called for a goat to be slaughtered and divided into pieces. Sarakisi was to give two people each one side of the neck. The head was to be split open, and the jawbones divided between two additional people. Sarakisi and Ganyawa were to determine two men from their own village half, and Nabunya and Medau were to choose two from their half of the village. So the number of men chosen was eight. Ghambageu gave them permission to increase this number to include helpers or substitutes, but the eight were the central group. The rest are helpers. So Raghari has four *benamijye* from each half of the village.

Afterwards Ghambageu told them what their future responsibilities would be. But the central role was to ensure that people should live in peace in his name. But if someone broke the rules, and they forgave him or he paid a fine as compensation, then Ghambageu too would forgive that person. Additional punishment coming from Ghambageu would not be necessary. This was Ghambageu's blessing of the *benamijye* in Raghari.<sup>11</sup>

In this story there are several key symbolic elements which are significant in today's world of the *benamijye* and to which they pay great attention: Ghambageu as the provider of water,<sup>12</sup> the number of *benamijye* in each village is eight, the division of the village in two moieties, the brewing of honey beer, the sacrifice of a goat and its division among the elders, the institution of specific laws and the sentencing of transgressors with a fine to redress social breaches (*njoko*).

Another story about the establishment of the *etongɔ* through Ghambageu in Eroghata (Sale) highlights how Ghambageu appointed the head person of the council:

Now Ghambageu divided them into eight sections. From each group he would choose a representative from amongst them by stretching out his legs and touching a man on the head. He chose the eight men without talking to them. In this way he showed that he was superior to them. When the eight were chosen, they were given a calabash. When the beer was poured out, they noticed that Ghambageu also had a calabash, the ninth, and his was made of metal.<sup>13</sup>

In the same account, Ghambageu gives the elders instructions about their future work:

Finally he gave the eight men their tasks for which they would be held responsible; on the one hand they were to insure that all the prayers and ceremonies concerning him were enforced, and on the other hand to ensure that the division of water was fairly done, to avoid conflict over water allotments. These two areas of responsibility have since that time belonged to the *benamijye*.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the elders were instructed to build a house for Ghambageu under distinct labour division for the various sections of the construction:

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<sup>11</sup> Author's translation from German (Schäfer 1999c, 30–31)

<sup>12</sup> There are other stories in which Ghambageu is the originator of the springs (cf. Schäfer 1999c, 277).

<sup>13</sup> Author's translation from German (Schäfer 1999c, 34)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Ghambageu told them to return the next day to discuss how they could build him a house. The next day the men came to organize building a house for Ghambageu. The following day they were to go into the woods, cut down posts for the house. The older men were responsible for the walls, whereas the young warriors were to make the beams of the roof. The women were responsible for cutting grass and covering the structure ... The house of Ghambageu is still there today. Every 30 years it is rebuilt with the same division of labour. No other work is allowed on that day, so that all can participate. The other villages of the Batemi send honey for this ceremony, so that beer can be brewed.<sup>15</sup>

When asked what the main work of the *benamijye* was, Sediyya's answer – although a mere summary of these responsibilities – points out that the elders are not simple law-enforcers, but concerned about the right balance between the order of the wider world (cosmos), and social-moral order of the community:

One large task is to manage the water and distribute it to the people. Because even a *mukyama* needs to ask water from the *benamijye*, or a commoner as well. Another task is when a person dies in the village; the *benamijye* will need to be consulted. Should the person be buried or not (i.e. if there is a *ghorcu* the mourners are not supposed to cry out loud, or there should be a congregation of mourners, each mourner is to be shaved at his home, not at the deceased's place). Another task is to supervise the area; if someone made a fire in *bwæelɔ* (trees burned and beehives destroyed), that person is fined (*njoko*). Afterwards the *benamijye* bring an offering (sheep) in the wilderness to cleanse the wilderness. Another: If a father has a small child of up to one month, he is not allowed to drink water at a waterhole in *bwæelɔ*. This would cause the bees to move away. The elders summon him and fine him. A sheep is offered again. These rules were given to the elders by Ghambageu and it is the authority to fine the men which they fear. Furthermore, the council of elders was like a government. When the modern (Tanzanian) government emerged, our own government still continued alongside it until today.<sup>16</sup>

While these narratives about the genesis of the village council outline in a rough script the *benamijye*'s office and work, they fail to explain why it was necessary to impose a new governance system at all. Why were the clan leaders not able to manage to govern their own territories and communities without the super-structure of a village council which presumably eclipsed the authority of the clan elders in substantial ways? Furthermore, the stories are not used to legitimize the existence or the authority of the *benamijye* as one would expect at a time when their *raison d'être* is challenged. There is undoubtedly a vivid recollection of Ghambageu as the founder of the *etngɔ*, but not in the sense of a heritage of specific rules or commandments. On the contrary, the commandments are quite general and it is left to the elders to interpret each emerging social situation within its context and apply their judgment as they see fit, drawing from

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 35

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



their wisdom and life experience. Instead of being used in a justifying mode, these stories are more likely told to bring coherence to their collective past, to redress and make sense of the past which is otherwise fragmented and chaotic. The Ghambageu stories are likely the ‘polished’ versions of a dramatic collective experience which the Batemi underwent (either through an invasion by another group, a severe famine, or a devastating sickness) during which Ghambageu appeared on the scene and succeeded in leading the people through that time of crisis. As a result of Ghambageu’s intervention, the *etongo* was established and is still considered as central to their cultural identity. As Jackson states:

Such transformations may be momentary or magical, but in relating a reconfigured yet symbolically coherent version of an event, we come to feel that the true meaning of an event that befell and overpowered us lies within our grasp – partly, if not entirely, a matter of our own insight and agency. Narrative thereby mediates a reinvention of identity (2012a, 24).

Throughout these stories about the beginning of the *etongo*, there is no mention of the initiation ritual, or of the Kirimo cult – both of which are core elements in what constitute the meaning of being Mutemi today. Schäfer cites a story in which Ghambageu undergoes his initiation on Oldonyo Lengai where he encounters Ghambarisyori, his father. In this encounter, Ghambageu is killed by the rays of Ryoba (the sun), his spleen is replaced with a stone, and he is resurrected to life by Ryoba.<sup>17</sup> But since Ghambageu is no longer featuring in the *mase* celebration today, we must assume that the Temi cosmology has undergone a shift over the last decades through a reconfiguration of the divinities mentioned in their myths, and, more importantly, called upon during their religious ceremonies. At least we find – contrary to Schäfer – that there is far less coherence among the Temi myths and their association with the initiation rituals. In Schäfer’s account, Ghambageu and Kirimo both feature as divine representatives as they appear to Temi boys when they are confronted with the numinous ‘world beyond’ their normal every-day experience (1999c, 323).

In the case of death of a council member, the remaining *etongo* members have to replace him with a suitable candidate from within the same lineage within a day or two. The criteria of the candidates are seniority and a reliable character (*monto ale nsoni*). The candidate must also be willing to take on this responsible position, since he always has

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<sup>17</sup> (Schäfer 1999c, 319–20)

the choice of refusing it.<sup>18</sup> There is also the possibility of officially installing a young man as an *mwenamijye*, but until he comes of age a relative of his occupies the position as his substitute. For the first few years, a new member of the village council will be able to take part in their meetings but without rights of voicing his opinion, or making any decisions. His status is one of a student of the elders' wisdom and ritual practices, and as a messenger between social groups. Only if he proves faithful in carrying out the tasks entrusted to him will he be able to move up to more complex affairs.

The ritual carried out by the *benamijye* during the transition period of installing a new elder is called *esabya mai*, the 'cleansing of the water'. The water (and as an extension the fields and their produce) needs to be cleansed from the potential or real transgressions (*ng'adaba*) which the previous *mwenamijye* committed. The same ritual (sometimes with slight variations) is performed when the restricted area around the water springs (*biiso ndane*) is entered by a sexually active man, or after the illegal burial in the area below the water furrows which formerly was strictly reserved for irrigated fields. The core elements of the ritual are the slaughtering of goats or sheep, the preparation and consummation of the meat by the elders, the pouring of the rumen content into the water near the source of the stream, and the chanting of prayers and blessings.<sup>19</sup>

#### 5.4 The social structure of the *etongo*

Social structures and institutions do not exist in isolation of the people who – as social agents through their continuous practice – recreate and uphold these virtual concepts (Bourdieu 1992, 210; López 2001, 89–107; Giddens 1984). This is especially true for the Batemi who do not perceive their social structures as separate from the way they experience, for example, what the *etongo* or other institutions are as they engage with them. Knowledge of their institutions emerges through quotidian and occasional ritual interaction, through the application of embodied *gitemi* rules, and finally through the resulting experience of these engagements. Nevertheless, in thinking about how the

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<sup>18</sup> I can think of at least two men who have been nominated as *mwenamijye* candidates and have rejected the proposal.

<sup>19</sup> A detailed account of the *esabya mai* ritual is provided in the appendix (see Appendix 11.6).

*etongɔ* is structured and how it relates to other institutions, it will be helpful to provide a synoptic description in order to understand how the *etongɔ* is situated within the Temi social fabric.

The village of Ebwe is divided into two village halves (*haara* or *mulongo*). The two sides derive their names from the first two village clans, Mulongo (the western area) and Bisone (the eastern area). Each clan has a *mwenamijye* in the village council, but there are only 12 elders (6 per moiety) who make up the main council. The rule of succession demands that a *mwenamijye* is replaced by a man from the same clan. The successor can either be the son of a deceased elder, or his brother. The main attribute of an eligible candidate is his good character (*monto ale nsoni*), and it is the *etongɔ* that retains the right to accept or refuse a candidate put forth by a lineage.

The council of elders is called *etongɔ*, but if the council is fully assembled, this meeting is called *kyaso ky'etongɔ* (*kyaso* also means ‘thought’, thus something like a think-tank). A meeting of a part of the *etongɔ* with the purpose of discussing a routine matter (e.g. water distribution schedule), they refer to as a *ghuseri* (which is the name of the men’s meeting place) or as a *mute* (the tree as the metonymic symbol for a gathering).<sup>20</sup>

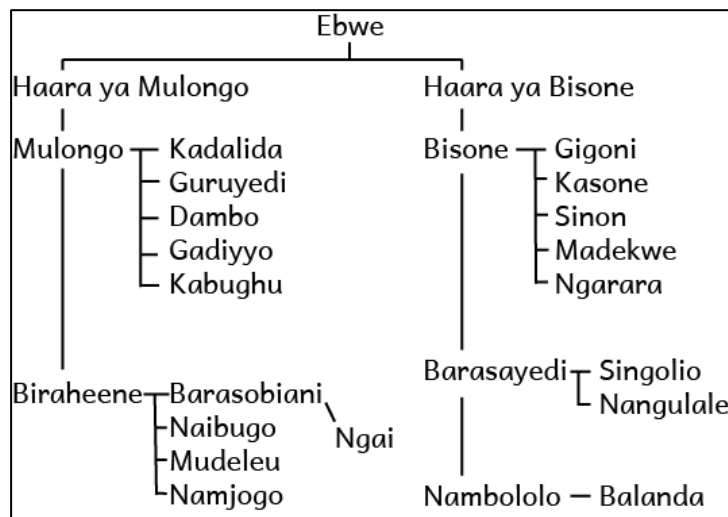


Figure 5.1 Clans of the village of Ebwe<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See also the chart of the Ebwe *etongɔ* with the corresponding position of elders and their meat shares in the appendix.

<sup>21</sup> The chart displays the historical bifurcation of the village clans into moieties, and the segmentation into more sub-clans.

It is likely that today's division of political territory into village halves (moieties) reaches back before the time of Ghambageu when the Batemi started to settle in the area. Oral transmissions relate how the areas around the water sources were distributed to the emerging clans,<sup>22</sup> and how the temple cult of the *ghorowane* was also divided into village halves, each moiety having its own Mugwe.<sup>23</sup> It would seem natural that this was the also the period when a new political organization started to take shape as a way of controlling the access to spring water. The above mentioned story where it is Ghambageu who installs elders from each village side to administer the water rights and oversee the ceremonies is thus a conversion of previous practices assigned to the name of Ghambageu. It is conceivable that the Batemi thought of the arrival of Ghambageu as the beginning of a new era in their history, and used it to redefine their identity.

The *benamijye* are not only dependent on the community on economic, political, and religious grounds, but there is also a moral conditionality which binds these elders to observe the customary laws. Diverting from the expected moral behaviour can lead to the dismissal of a *mwenamijye*. The same rule applies to the leaders of the *ghorowane* cult. The post of a *mwenamijye* and of a *mughorowane* are by no means secured for a lifetime after the installation. The council is quite flexible in relegating an elder for a period of time. While the character traits of a council elder are important, his knowledge about *gitemi* traditions and the detailed sequences of a *ghorou* are not tested. A man is rather given time to learn them, sometimes over the course of many years, and thus grow accustomed to them. The important part is that every position is filled with a person. This person may not be residing in the village and will appoint a substitute, with the understanding that one day he will return to the post. In one case, the position was filled by a woman, the widow of a deceased *mwenamijye*.<sup>24</sup>

Rather than a rigid political system with strict rules, the *etongu* as an institution is quite flexible with fluid border areas where elders move in and out of the office. It is also important to notice that the *benamijye*'s authority is contingent on temporal and spatial circumstances in which their action takes place; that is, a political decision, a blessing, curse, or a judgment only carry weight if performed within the right spatiotemporal context.

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<sup>22</sup> Rec: SG 16 Dec 2014, Ebwe

<sup>23</sup> Rec: SG 24 Sep 2014, Ebwe

<sup>24</sup> Rec: SG 11 Apr 2013, Ebwe

Political discussions and movements run along the fault lines of the age-groups and are communicated to the *benamijye* via the age-set leaders (*bekorani*) or the junior assistants of the *etongɔ* (*baribita*).<sup>25</sup> The age-sets – especially the first two, called the *nsombi* – are endowed with considerable political power because they are in charge of the care and protection of the Kirimo cult, and they are also responsible for the physical protection of the village community. While the *benamijye* may feel responsible for the overall welfare of the community in the long trajectory over several generations, the *batana* of the *nsombi* age-sets feel bound to carry out the heavy charge of ‘not dropping the secret of Kirimo’ which was imposed upon them through their initiation. The relationship between these two groups, the *etongɔ* and the *nsombi* leaders is at times charged with high tension since a breakdown between these two groups can potentially be disastrous for the entire community. The elders are dependent on the discipline of the *nsombi* men to perform their duty by carrying out their domestic tasks (e.g. protect the village from Maasai attacks, search for lost goats and cattle, clean the water canals etc.) and their ritual activities (e.g. be present and participate during the main ceremonies, perform and protect the secret of Kirimo).

The *benamijye* need to guide the *nsombi* group to keep *gitemi* customs with the appropriate moderation and discipline. The present *nsombi* group leaders had introduced severe penalties (e.g. whipping) for minor disciplinary failures like disobedience to a command of an age-set leader. When the *benamijye* were informed of these measures, they immediately intervened with the *bekorani* of these two age-sets to revise such harsh conduct. On a reverse note, I have heard stories which relate how the *benamijye* applied extreme measures when the newly initiated age-set leaders were unwilling to comply with the Temi precepts the elders had laid out before them.<sup>26</sup> The following diagram thus structures the social institutions in Ebwe in the following way (with the women forming a unified group separate from the men):

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<sup>25</sup> The *baribita* are the sons of the *benamijye* who act as emissaries of the *etongɔ* to the age-sets.

<sup>26</sup> NB The story goes that the defiant neophyte age-set leaders were all led away from the assembly of men and executed. The elders then chose new *bekorani* who would be willing to accept the rules of Kirimo. There is no evidence that the story is true, but even as a mere rumour it would strike young initiates with fear.

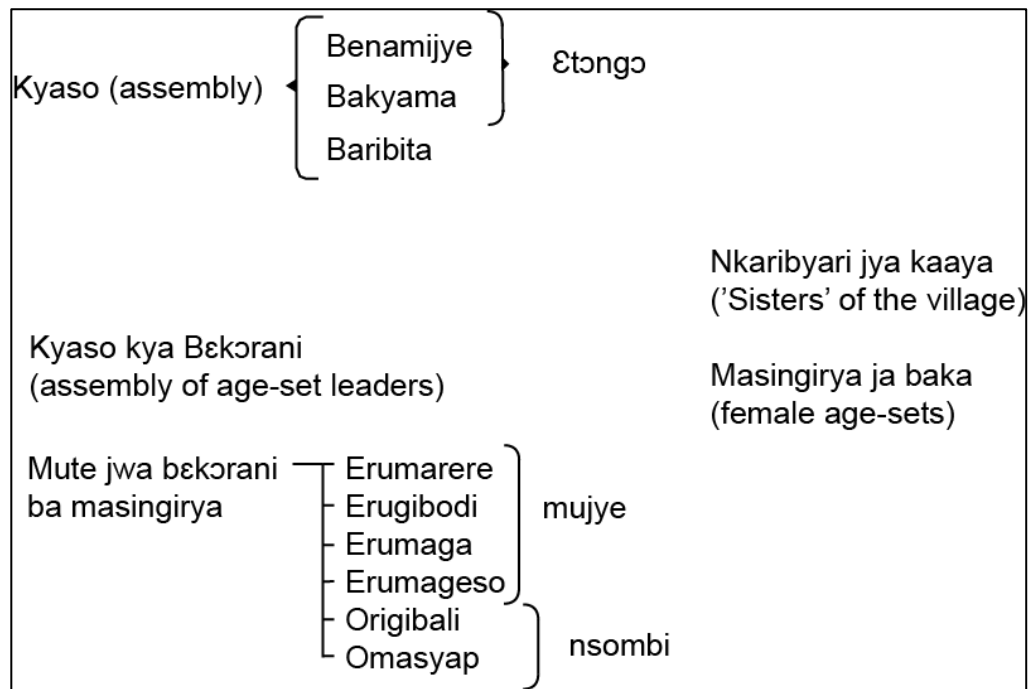


Figure 5.2 Temi political institutions<sup>27</sup>

### 5.5 Benamijye at work

A discussion of the practices of the *benamijye* can only be meaningful if considered within the social framework of other Temi institutions, a topic which will be taken up here. Furthermore, in the light of other political governance models one can think of (i.e. a clan-based or a centralized government), there is the question of what gives the *benamijye* political legitimacy to function as communal authorities in questions of customary law and ritual performances. For some authors, the *etongo*'s political power seems to be derived foremost from economic rationale simply by the fact that they 'own' the water springs and are thus entitled to distribute the scarce resource in return for political power (Adams, Potkanski, and Sutton 1994; Gray 1974, 1-24, 144). Others point out how it was Ghambageu who first established the council of elders, handed them control of the spring water and mandated them with rules which they should forthwith keep (Schäfer 1999c, 30–52; Vähäkangas 2008a, 39–49). While I believe that

<sup>27</sup> The group of 12 *benamijye* form the village leadership called *etongo*. This council can be extended and include members of the *bakyama* (sg. *mukyama*, assistants to the *benamijye*) group. The leadership *kyaso* (assembly) includes the *benamijye*, *bakyama*, and the delegates of the age-sets (*baribita*). The leadership of the age-sets are called *kyaso kya bekorani bwa mujye* (the assembly of the age-set leaders of the older age-sets), and *kyaso kya bekorani bwa nsombi* (leaders of the youngest two age-sets). The women also have age-sets (pl. *masingirya*, sg. *singirya*) with two leaders in each set (*singirya lya baka*).

both arguments – economic (water as necessary commodity in a small-scale subsistence community) and religious factors (mythological rationale for establishing legitimate leadership) – are sensible explanations for the ongoing vitality of the *etongɔ* institution, both accounts leave much of the *benamijye*’s behaviour unexplained. For example, why is it that the *benamijye* – despite some rumours about the opposite – do not accept payment for their work of distributing irrigation water? In other words, they do not ‘sell’ water as Potkanski and Adams postulate (cf. 1998a). If things were that straightforward, the *benamijye* would surely exploit their position and make material gains from it. But as a matter of fact, the *benamijye* are not better off than other villagers; on the contrary, they feel obliged to share what they have with others who are in need and are sometimes wanting basic necessities. Or if we take the mythological reason for their political status which states that the *benamijye* draw their authority on a mandate given by Ghambageu, why is it that – contrary to Vähäkangas’ argument (2008b, 127–34) of an increase in prominence – Ghambageu has in fact become less prominent in Temi religion over the last decade? In my own observations of their religious ceremonies and in interviews with Temi men (Christians and non-Christians), a curious decline of this figure seems to take place. Rather than accepting these ‘obvious’ reasons for the *etongɔ*’s sustained political status as community leaders, I argue that we follow a ‘logic of practice’ (cf. Bourdieu 1992 ch. 7,8; 1977) suggesting that it is the elders’ reputation of successfully and effectively performed rituals, as well as their experience of past crises by which they have accumulated sufficient political capital to maintain the support and approval of the majority in the community. It is this ‘symbolic added-value’ (such as gratitude, homage, and respect) which the *benamijye* receive in return for the services they render to the community.

If one wants to see the elders for a consultation meeting or to require a water slot for one’s fields, the best time is early in the morning at sunrise. That is the time when the *benamijye* meet and discuss the affairs of the day. During the dry months when the *huura* fields in the valley are especially in need of water, the planning of the assignment of water time slots to the villagers takes up most of their time. During their morning meetings, they can see the *muhageeri* (the main priest) who lives higher up in the hills, performing his morning prayers.<sup>28</sup> He welcomes the gods Ryoba, Ghulubeda, and

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 6.8 for sample of Morning Prayer.

Mesaga on the new day and calls upon them to bless the affairs of everyone in the village.

Depending on the season and need for irrigated water, the time the *benamijye* spend debating and agreeing on the allotment of water periods varies considerably. During the first few weeks after the maize has been planted (and especially if the rains fail, which is occurring more frequently in recent years), the demand for furrow water is high, and the elders spend more time managing water allotment. In Ebwe there are two main water canals, the upper Ebwe line and the lower Bise line. The Ebwe canal which carries most of the spring water and is able to reach more *huura* fields is the most important, and is therefore managed conjointly by the leaders of the Mulongo and Bisone moiety. In one sense, there is much clock-work routine as the water allotment alternates between the two village clans, each getting access to irrigation water for two days at a time. However, after eight days of switching back and forth, the members of the *ghorowane* and another group called the *bakyama b'etongɔ* are entitled to a full day of irrigation water. Each *mwenamijye* who owns a time slot will either use it for his own fields, or redistribute it to members of his clan.

The lower Bise line carries less water than the upper canal. In the past, this lower canal was water fed by the seasonal stream which enters the village of Ebwe from the valley of Tinaga, until a man from Ebwe dug out a connection between the upper and lower canal. In order to conceal the man-made action that diverted the water from one canal into another, a well-known story explains instead, that crabs have penetrated a hole between the two streams. The Bise line is governed by a third group of elders called the *bakyama b'etongɔ* who meet independently to discuss the distribution of their water without consulting the Mulongo or Bisone elders. Occasionally, because of a client request, the elders may want to exchange the flow of water from one village side to the other (which is possible because the two streams intersect). This process is called *n'ekɔrania* (to differ, to exchange) and requires that members of both parties meet to agree a change of schedule.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Batemi's irrigation system and its management has been acknowledged and described as one case of a series of clusters of small-scale irrigation societies in East Africa (Gray 1974 [1963]:47–61; Potkanski & Adams 1998; Adams et al. 1994; Potkanski 1987; Strauch & Almedom 2011). In Ebwe, one irrigation cycle lasts eight days with alternating two-day slots for each village side. The *bakyama b'etongɔ* and the priestly group receive irrigation water for single days in between. Except for the Sinoni clan and the Baturi, all villagers have a clan representation in the village council (either as major or minor *mwenamijye*) through whom they can apply for water.



The schedule of who is receiving water at what time is never put down in writing but entirely memorized. My suggestion that it might be easier to write down the names and times of specific water recipients was met with incredulous laughter. Considering the large number of clients and numerous short-notice changes in the distribution schedule, the smooth running of their irrigation system is a phenomenal feat.<sup>30</sup> Although writing down schedules would be a conceivable possibility (i.e. there are enough younger members in the *etngɔ* who have been to school and can write), using this modern tool to run an ancient institution may seem contradictory to them (cf. Goody 1986).

The *benamijye* further discuss any affair that needs attention on that particular day, or whatever remains to be done in preparation of the next *ghɔɔu*. When the time of a *ghɔɔu* is approaching, the council has to settle the question of who is preparing honey beer, who will be part of the opening procession (*baghɔɔwane*) to the Raghari temple huts, and who will provide goats or sheep for the offerings. The council will delegate these tasks to the *bakyama*<sup>31</sup> (members of the group of men associated with the *benamijye*). A *mwakyama* whose turn has come up to bring an *sedani* (offering) will be informed ahead of time so that he can make the necessary arrangements. In return, the *bakyama* receive privileged treatment when it comes to water distribution, because after the *benamijye* themselves, they are next in rank to get water shares. These sessions are held at the semi-public *ghuseri* (a meeting place) near the Kiritone (the village plaza where ceremonies are held) and are fairly informal; that is, they do not follow a strict protocol. Most of the affairs discussed are routine matters and therefore do not need the presence or consent of all the council members. If at least two members of each village half participate, this carries the mandate of the entire *etngɔ*. The meeting is accessible for any adult man who can simply join them and wait for his turn to speak. The last word in any decision, however, remains with the council chief (*mukolo w'etngɔ*) who is normally present during their deliberations, or is kept in the loop about their discussions.

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<sup>30</sup> Potkanski & Adams (1998a) explore the dynamics of the Sonjo water management and the failed attempt to modernize it by replacing the traditional elders' council with an elected water committee.

<sup>31</sup> Every initiated man in good social standing can become a *mukyama* by asking the *etngɔ*'s permission. If he should repeatedly fail to come up with the required contribution to a *ghɔɔu*, he will be dismissed or replaced by another man. The *bakyama* are occasionally summoned to the *ghuseri* to discuss important communal issues.

After their morning meetings, each elder pursues his own domestic errands, attends to his fields, or simply returns to his home. At home they may look after the goats (which are kept in the homestead if they are not out in Sumine, the grazing areas) or they are busy taking care of their drinking vessels, cleaning and fixing the *byaho* (calabash) or *nsoha* (large beer pot). Another common task is to carve out new beehives (*miringa*) which are later transported to the wilderness and strung up in trees. They are the pride of the elders and a topic of discussion among friends. The wife of a *mwenamijye* is mostly busy with domestic affairs like cooking and cleaning the home, and organizing drinking water. She looks after the grandchildren who often stay with the grandparents while their own parents are working the fields.

As guardians of the natural territory, the *benamijye* keep an eye on the sacred spring area in the dense forest. Nobody is allowed to enter the area surrounding the springs, except those men who have restrained from sexual intercourse for at least three months. Within the restricted territory, no trees can be cut down. The springs are more than just a natural resource for survival, since the surrounding area is also the locus of significant events during the initiation ritual. Guarding the place and ensuring the continuous flow of water thus carries multiple levels of importance.

Another task that is assigned to the *benamijye* is the supervision of all the *muringaringa* trees (*cordia africana*) from which they carve beehives for the production of honey and honey beer. All the *muringaringa* trees belong to the *benamijye*. If they walk through the fields and see a tree sprouting,<sup>32</sup> they will put small sticks around it for protection and tell the owner of the field not to uproot it. How serious they take their task of guarding these trees is captured in the following incident.

A *mutana*, Mariase's son Rafael, found a young tree in his field, about 20 feet high. He cut it off up above, and then just above the roots, and threw the trunk away. Then he went on a journey to Kenya. The *benamijye* discovered that the tree had been cut down, and took the piece of the trunk in order to curse him. They thrust the pole through an earthenware pot into the earth. When the termites start eating their way up the stick, the curse is said to slowly affect the person. As the termites attack the wood, so the person's life is slowly being eaten away. People pass by there, and see the pole, but do not know who has been cursed.

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<sup>32</sup> *Murembye* (tree sapling) appears in the myths as a female symbol. In the myth of childbirth, a woman gave birth through her head. She would die, and from her grave sprouted a sapling, the *murembye*. The child had to guard the sapling carefully, and after some time the mother would reappear. If left unguarded, and the *murembye* was cut down, the mother would not return.

The young man called his younger brother from Kenya, and told him that he had been sick, and gotten into some other misfortunes. The brother told him he had been cursed. Immediately the younger brother brought one goat to the *benamijye*, begging them to bless Rafael's journey back to Tanzania. At that point he would pay the three remaining goats necessary for the curse to be removed. The *benamijye* would have slaughtered another goat, taken the contents of the intestines and scattered them on the stream as a sign of cleansing. But when Rafael returned, he refused to pay the three goats to the *benamijye*. Instead, he went to his field, and completely uprooted the tree, which had begun to sprout again. When the *benamijye* saw this, they repeated the curse, this time pulling the pole out of the ground, saying: 'Akye!' (He shall die). The meaning is that the young man's life should perish right away. Indeed, the young man died a few weeks later.<sup>33</sup>

The *benamijye* do not passively keep to their own quarters waiting for villagers to bring petitions and requests to them. They also spend considerable amounts of time and energy engaging with the community during ritual occasions such as *bukwa* (marriage ceremonies) or resolving land disputes. It is their presence in the midst of the community and their engagement with the villagers that gains them the needed credit and authority to rule. As of today, the role of the *etong'o* institution is undisputed and still represents the centre of gravity of Temi customary law and jurisdiction. At the same time, there are signs of its demise as new social developments and state institutions are beginning to undermine the power of local political structures.

## 5.6 Challenges to the *etong'o*

The *benamijye*, deeply convinced that the *gitemi* tradition is still powerful and will not fail to impact their communities, are however, not optimistic about the future of their own role. Although they have experienced opposition to the *gitemi* way of life from the nation state and the churches, the erosion lines that imperil the work of the *etong'o* are not always as clear-cut. Sometimes Batemi who are otherwise in full accord with *gitemi* customs may undermine the authority of the *benamijye* by employing modern strategies of resolving a problem. For example, the number of court cases brought to the local

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<sup>33</sup> NB SG 24 June 2011

police station – instead of to the *etungu* to settle a conflict – increases steadily. There were even court cases in which Temi men dragged their elders to the district court where a non-Temi magistrate presided over affairs about which he had little cultural understanding.<sup>34</sup> How do the *benamijye* accept the fact that in some cases their authority is annulled and overruled by a *musyomba* (Swahili) judge? Can they accept having their traditional position as peacemakers and mediators taken from them? The elders may not have a quick answer to this new constellation, but they naturally tend to revert to their beliefs in Temi practices which, so they assured me, will prevail in the end.

The public oath, the one recourse which used to be a powerful instrument to counter insubordination among their own people, has recently become weakened by the misuse of one of their own members.<sup>35</sup> One of the core principles of the *etungu* governance, namely to speak with one voice and not to betray the secrets of the council, has been compromised and the reputational damage is hard to repair. Furthermore, an increasing number of young men are finding it more lucrative to find a paid menial job outside the Butemine area, or continue their studies in higher education instead of continuing in their traditional role as *bwekerya* (guardians, police force) of the village community and the *gitemi* secret. But then, without the active participation of the youngest two age-sets who are instrumental in enacting and staging the *mase* celebration, the work of the *benamijye* would become seriously fragile, maybe even obsolete.

## 5.7 Conclusion

The *etungu* institution is a historical social construct with a beginning at a time when it served a specific communal need to organize and order the community. Being a historical invention it thus continues to be contingent on changing contexts to which it

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<sup>34</sup> NB 2 Aug 2013

<sup>35</sup> NB 1 Aug 2011, 16 May 2012, and 22 Sep 2014. Kabughu, a junior *mwenamijye* was temporarily banned from the *etungu* meetings because he betrayed information about the elder's discussions. The subjects of the elder's discussions require utmost confidentiality. But Kabughu tried to turn this confidential knowledge into a profitable business. In one case, he secretly told the incriminated man that the *benamijye* had issued a curse against him and offered to remedy the situation in exchange for an amount of money. In another case, Kabughu informed government officials about the exact date a female circumcision ceremony was to be held, so that the police could come and make arrests.

has to adapt. The advent of the nation-state with its bureaucratic principles of governance and land mapping has obviously influenced the way the Batemi perceived their own culture in general, and the *etongo* in particular. Despite the growing influence of the Tanzanian government policies in Temi social life, the Batemi have been able to withstand the eradication of their ways (as has happened in many other places in Tanzania). Especially regarding some of their most important rituals which mark their identity, such as the initiation ritual, there was defiant refusal to give them up. There are a number of serious challenges that threaten to subvert the role the *etongo* is playing in Temi society, but the *benamijye* seem to outlast any difficulty that is thrown at them. They continue to adhere to the rules of *gitemi* which have been entrusted to them by their forefathers, and they keep recruiting successors of *benamijye* who learn the trade of the elders, and grow in that knowledge that proves more powerful than any subversive outside influences.

## Chapter 6

### 6. TEMI CEREMONIAL CALENDAR

*Rituals derive some of their most important properties from the fact that they are constructed in time.*

(Bourdieu 1992, 98)

#### 6.1 Introduction

There is a certain danger of presenting the Temi ceremonial cycle as a collated sequence of public events which are routinely performed, no matter what the circumstances are.<sup>1</sup> Such an objectified, observer-based representation of the Temi calendar does not take account of how the Batemi experience different seasons of the year, and how their behaviour is based on an urgency and pressure of the things ‘to be done’ before a *ghorou* can be celebrated. The Temi year consists of dynamic and slack times – periods where time seems to stand still and when rapid transitions take place. The Batemi’s ceremonial calendar is best described as an unfolding of events which codify their social existence.

In Chapter Six I describe the main aspects of the Temi ceremonial calendar. This overview of the ceremonial cycle will lead up to Chapter Seven which focuses on the main ceremony, the feast of *mase* and the initiation ritual.

#### 6.2 Ritual strategies, space, and time

There is no corresponding expression in the Gitemi language for the concept ‘ritual’ or ‘religion’, because the Batemi are not primarily concerned with *orthodoxy*, but with

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<sup>1</sup> Neither Schäfer’s chart of Temi festivals (1999c, 338), nor Gray’s list of ritual events (1974b, 108–20) stress the significance of *mase* and other ceremonies as threshold events through which the Batemi transition into seasons of a different quality.

orthopraxis.<sup>2</sup> The closest expression for ritual they use is *ghorou*, which means religious procession, offering, or worship. The Batemi also do not separate *ghorou* into dichotomies such as action vs. meaning, or ritual vs. belief, body vs. mind; it is rather that their ritual action such as dancing, offering, and bodily gestures embody and mediate what they believe. Celebrating a *ghorou* means engaging with all of their senses in order to experience the reality that is evoked through what they see, feel, smell, and taste. As Paul Stoller articulates it, ‘the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes ...’ (1994, 7). Engaging in a *ghorou* literally makes sense to them.

There is also a very pragmatic aspect to the way the Batemi look at a *ghorou*. A ritual celebration, an offering, or an initiation rite is not just a routine repetition of a pre-configured action (although it is that, too), but is preceded by careful, strategic planning. Without such extended deliberations before every ceremony, how could it possibly produce a meaningful result? Other rituals, such as the divination of future events through the reading of animal intestines are simply repeated if they do not match up with the desired results. For the Batemi right action (practice) is paramount over right belief – although the two are not disconnected, either. As Laura Grillo argues:

African religions are pragmatic in focus and share the view that humans must vigilantly maintain harmonious relationships in both worldly and divine realms in order to prosper. Ritual is the means to negotiate a responsible relationship in the human community, with the ancestors, spirits, divinities, and cosmos. African rituals are reflexive strategies seeking practical ends: they establish identity, elicit revelation, access divinity to foster empowerment, and effect transformation (Bongmba 2012, 112).

Temi rituals and ceremonies are considered, then, not so much as distinct and singular phenomena, as examples of ritualistic and routine activities such as dances, jumping contests, or drumming, but they are distinct practices which are performed according to a cultural logic and timed with a strategic purpose. I argue that the cultural logic behind much of the Batemi’s ritual (and quotidian practices) is what they call *gitemi*, that is, what is roughly called their traditional way of life. Instead of singling out and analysing *ghorou* and other rituals as atomized modes of behaviour, I want to show

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<sup>2</sup> William Sax, discussing the aporetic nature of rituals, admits the conundrum it poses to the modern scholar: ‘The point is that the term ritual is our (post-enlightenment) term, and it reflects our problem - how to classify a certain set of apparently non-rational acts’ (Sax, Quack, and Weinhold 2010, 4). It seems more promising to start with a looser concept of ritual, such as for example Wendy James’ approach in her book ‘The Ceremonial Animal’. She defines ritual as a ‘deliberate ceremonial performance, physically enacted or enactable, and transformative in intention or in effect’ that ‘entail(s) use or treatment of the body, controlled use of space and specific timing of actions’ (2004, 107).

what marks Temi *ghorou* from non-ritual activities, how these rituals are used strategically, and how they tie in with the overall cultural logic of *gitemi*.

Another aspect of *ghorou* and the Temi ceremonial calendar is that these ceremonies are not simply aligned in linear succession like beads on a string, a reiteration of the same actions. The Temi calendar is divided into two halves with each one characterized by different moral and ethical standards. The Batemi – being immersed in the reality of their cosmic time – find themselves at specific points in time within their calendar year with specific events looming on the horizon for which they are preparing themselves. The logic of the practitioner is very different from the one of the spectator (cf. Bourdieu 1992, 80), and in this sense the Temi men and women are subjected to different moods, moral obligations and aspirations as the year unfolds. When the Temi calendar is portrayed as a chart that displays a synopsis of the various ceremonies held in Temi villages (Schäfer 1999c, 338), it gives the impression that these *ghorou* take place in a mechanical fashion, without consideration of varying social, economic, or political circumstances that may alter the time or manner of a *ghorou* execution. But ritual engagements are always co-situated and conditioned by the world people inhabit and the worldly needs and desires which emanate from that inhabitation. *Ghorou* are also about manipulation, strategic counter measures of wrongdoing, or the implementation of socio-political hegemony. And above all, the outcome of a *ghorou* is often undetermined, that is, there is an element of surprise in the aftermath of a ritual, the possibility that the outcome turned out differently from the intended results. For example, in the 1980s the *benamijye* of Ebwe used an oath (*ebeeka muuma*) against the Christians who, in their eyes, disrupted the order and cohesion of the community; instead of affecting the Christians, the curse ‘rebounded’ and killed several of the elders’ children instead. The elders eventually had to carry out a counter oath to eliminate the first one.<sup>3</sup> Another example of how a *ghorou* can become a contested event and a struggle over the proper execution is the initiation ritual. Whereas in the majority of times the boys who are to be initiated submit themselves to the initiation ordeal, occasionally the leaders of the new age-set show defiance to undergo the preordained ritual, or novices escape from their home village in order to avoid initiation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> NB 13 Nov 2004

<sup>4</sup> NB 4 Feb 2011



Therefore, while through the various *ghorou* the *benamijye* are trying to determine and control a specific result (like the transformation of boys into men, the punishment of a transgressor of *gitemi* law, the cleansing of people and the land etc.), there is always an element of indeterminacy which makes the performance of ritual a delicate and precarious matter. It also opens up *ghorou* as a subject of possible interpretations over different ways of preparing and executing the ritual, and it puts the work of the ritual administrators under some criticism.<sup>5</sup> An ‘objective’ representation of *ghorou* which portrays them as perennial ritual cycles falls short of capturing the true dynamic of these events. It forgets that people find themselves in contested social relationships, subject to economic pressures and power struggles. And finally, it omits the fact that ritual actions are carried out in a culturally defined perception of time which affects the participants with a sense of urgency in the build-up toward a *ghorou*, or the satisfaction of a successfully completed ceremony.

### 6.3 *Ghorou* and *Gighoba*

Semantically, the word *ghorou* clearly belongs to the domain religion. The lexical stem -*ghor-* is used in words such as *εghora* (v., to praise, bless), *εghorowane* (v., to worship), *mughorowane* (n., priest), *ghorowane* (n., procession to a sacred site, temple hut), *ghorou* (n., religious ceremony, worship), not to mention the many compound words in which it occurs. Schäfer merely translates *ghorou* as a ‘procession to the temple’ (1999c, 391) which does not do justice to its broader meaning, but is at least more sympathetic toward an indigenous interpretation than Gray, Donovan, or Vähäkangas who do not mention the word at all.

For the Batemi, *ghorou* is to engage with their gods (Bagwe) through ritual activities. *Ghorou* activities also encompass the search for these transcendent divinities in the hopes of being granted one’s desire. As AG, himself being a member of the priestly clan, expresses it: ‘*Ghorou* is to look for Mugwe, in order that god may help us in the things we want. So we pray to god, that we may receive.’<sup>6</sup> The *ghorou* means a

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<sup>5</sup> The older women are keen observers of the work of the *benamijye* and they can intervene if they see the peace of the community threatened. Cf. also Katherine Snyder on women’s protests against elders among the Iraqw of Tanzania (Snyder 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Rec: AG 3 Mar 2008

chance to receive the blessing of the Bagwe, such as material prosperity, restored health, birth of children, and reparation of difficult relationships with a relative or neighbour. In order to achieve these states, a transaction between the petitioner and the gods needs to take place. Again, AG explains:

The work of a *ghorou* is to give the thing you have. You have to give, for example, your cow, or you give your gourd (with food), so that they may bring it to the *ghorou*. It is taking something of your own in order to plead with god, so that you get the thing that you want. Whether it is health, or whether it is material things that you want. That is the purpose of a *ghorou*.<sup>7</sup>

The preparations and performance of all *ghorou* lie in the hands of the *etongo*. It is the *benamijye* who determine the time of a celebration and are in charge of organizing the appropriate *sedani* (contributions) which normally consist of goats and honey beer. The members of the *bakyama* group (of which the *benamijye* themselves are also members) take turns in providing these offerings. With around sixty men in this group, a *mukyama* (sg. of *bakyama*) is only called upon to prepare a contribution once every other year.

The elders distinguish between two types of *ghorou*, the ones that are carried out around the *kaaya* centre of the village (either at one of the *ghuseri* or at the *ghorowane*) and those that are performed outside the *kaaya* or along its periphery (*bweelo*, *biiso ndane*, *kijoomi*, *huura*).<sup>8</sup> The ceremonies belonging to the first set are: *Gighoba kya kilemela*, *gighoba kya museera*, *gighoba kya gharari*, and *gighoba kya buta*. The *ghorou* outside of the *kaaya* premises are *biiso ndane* and *ng'ondi ya nsenge*.<sup>9</sup>

Some of these mentioned *ghorou* are also called *gighoba*, and there is some ambiguity in the meaning of these two terms. Some men claim that there is a clear distinction between a *ghorou* and a *gighoba*:

There is a *gighoba* and a *ghorou*. A *gighoba* and a *ghorou* are different from one another. A *ghorou* is where you give something like a *sedani* or *maghoti* (meat from the neck). And a *gighoba* is about being happy and eating, about making one another cheerful. This is how they are different; one is about giving something for the gods, and the other is about eating and being happy. That is how a *ghorou* and a *gighoba* are different from one another.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> See Map 7.1 on p. 170

<sup>9</sup> NB 26 Feb 2010

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

According to this explanation, the distinctive feature of a *ghorou* is an offering (*sedani*) brought to the *ghorowane* priest, while a *gighoba* lacks that element and is the celebration on the clan or family level during which a strip of goat skin (the *gighoba*) is worn around a finger of each participant. A typical *gighoba* celebration would be a *bukwa*, a traditional wedding feast. The two words *ghorou* and *gighoba* do have fuzzy definitions and are used according to the recognition of family resemblances (Wittgenstein), rather than contrasting concepts separated by neat boundaries.

## 6.4 The festival calendar

The ceremonial calendar of the Batemi is an intricate system that is marked by three kinds of rituals. Firstly, there are rituals that are bound to the agricultural cycle (*mbarimbari*, *kilemela*, *gighoba kya gharari*), the second are religious rituals (*ebira*, *esaeka*, *mase*), and the third are rites of transition celebrated at birth, initiation, marriage, and death. Each of the six villages follows their own ceremonial cycle, with some variations in minor rituals. However, while the male initiation rite (which occurs every 7-10 years) is synchronized across all villages, the annual *mase* celebration takes place sequentially in one village after another. *Mase* thus forms its own major ceremonial cycle into which the other minor ceremonies are integrated. *Mase* presents the climax of the ceremonial season, and consequently requires careful planning in each community, and coordination with other villages. This is the task of the *benamijye* of the villages.

While the village elders are fully engaged in the orchestration of the main *ghorou*, the commoners are only participating in the *mbarimbari* and the *mase* celebration (and, of course, in the rites of passage as they happen to occur). Most of the other *ghorou* are carried out by the elders and a select few who are involved in the ritual processions to the sacred sites.

The Temi calendar year thus consists of a number of religious and non-religious ritual events with different qualities and aims, different moods and intensities, and different obligatory claims to participation and commitment. While in our Western societies there is hardly a common theme that interconnects religious and secular celebrations, with the Batemi each celebration carries an underlying current of *gitemi* values and thus reinforces their common identity.

The cycle of communal ceremonies is intertwined with the rites of passage, the other ritual axis which marks the growth of the person. While each Mutemi is able to see others pass through different stages and rites, an individual himself is *en route* as the self-subject on his or her own life journey. The conjunction of both axes, the ceremonial calendar and the central rite of passage takes place in *mase* (which serves as the framework for the initiation rite) when the individual male is ritually transformed into a gendered adult member of the community.

## 6.5 Two seasons: *Mbarimbari* and *Mwēeri wa Monto Mukolo*

The Batemi distinguish between two ceremonial seasons of their year. One half is called the *mbarimbari* season which, in Ebwe, lasts from January to June with the celebration of *mbarimbari* in April. The other half is called the *mase* season, or in its euphemistic form, *mwēeri wa Monto Mukolo* (the season of the ‘Old Man’, that is, Kirimo). The *mase* season for the entire Butemine area is launched with the performance of *mase* in Eroghata. It immediately signals a change of moral bearing for all Temi men. From now on and until the end of the season, when the last *mase* festival is carried out in Soyeta, all initiated men are under severe obligation to keep the *gitemi* laws without fail. With the beginning of the *mase* season, and even more so when Kirimo is actually visiting one’s village, the men are highly conscious not to fall short of the laws of Kirimo. This change of behaviour is noticeable in the adjustment of men’s behaviour, in the way they carefully arrange their affairs, their avoidance of talking to strangers or outsiders, and in the manner they guard their conversations even among friends and age-mates, lest one betray the secret knowledge of Kirimo or fail to defend it. Indeed, the men are afraid to give away the secret of Kirimo while sleep talking. This possibility that a man can communicate the secret without deliberate intention bespeaks of the ambivalent nature of their relationship to Kirimo; rather than being completely in charge of this religious cult, the men are controlled by it.<sup>11</sup>

In Ebwe, the *mase* season starts with the *gighoba kya miseera*, the cleaning of the water canals by the two youngest age-sets. During this task for which they use hoes to

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<sup>11</sup> More on that fear of Kirimo and the self-inflicted law which restrains the men is explained in chapter 6 when discussing the *mase* ceremony.

clear and widen the furrows during two or three days, the *batana* are still allowed to use their drawn out staccato grunting sounds that end in a high note not unlike a yodelling sound (*ejɔkya nkɔlɔ*). But once this *gighɔba* is over, all behaviour that is associated with the *mbarimbari* season such as the deep-throated grunts through which the *batana* signal their presence to each other in the dark (or announce their arrival to a girl-friend), as well as the joyous high-tone exclamation when marching in a group and the typical *mbarimbari* dancing (*eghuuja kigobi*) are highly out of place. The reason why that behaviour is unacceptable and repugnant is that it is an imitation of Maasai dancing and singing, and Kirimo is not supposed to be mixed up with any other culture. If a *mutana* accidentally ‘forgets’ himself and issues such a call, or dances in the *mbarimbari* mode, he needs to bring a fine to the elders (usually a goat or the equivalent in money), and they will perform a cleansing ritual for him.<sup>12</sup>

Another difference between the two ceremonies is found in the way the *batana* (as the main actors) are dressed; their *mbarimbari* attire is more colourful, fanciful, with braided hair and sunglasses, whereas the *mase* dressing is more solemn and modest. Once Kirimo has arrived at a village and during the five days of celebration, the men are even more alert about their behaviour:

They are afraid to make mistakes when the Old Man has entered the *kaaya*. You are cowardly, you cannot fight, you cannot argue with your wife, you cannot talk foolishly about things; those all count as mistakes. Everything is done carefully.<sup>13</sup>

There is a strong awareness of one’s behaviour and a monitoring of every action which indicates the persistent power that the oath rendered to Kirimo is exercising over the men. If a man becomes aware that he has committed a mistake against the Kirimo law (*etɔnya*) – even if nobody else witnessed it or was affected by it – he is bound to die, unless he remedies himself by self-reporting his fault to the village elders who can avert the curse that has befallen him. To redress the breach, the payment to the elders is a goat, called *ehira ng’ɔndi wa serigwa* (bring a goat of cleansing). The normal reflex if a man becomes aware of a shortcoming is to immediately act out his redemption:

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<sup>12</sup> The cleansing (*etya mata*) is performed by the elders in the *ghuseri* (the sacred grove) by putting the rumen of the slaughtered goat onto the horns of Kirimo, accompanied by a word of prayer and blessing.

<sup>13</sup> Interview: SG 9 Apr 2013

If you hide it, you will die. If you feel that you have done something wrong, it is necessary for you to go, even without having been told by anyone else. You take along a sheep, or money, you will take it along and bring it to the elders.<sup>14</sup>

This behaviour could suggest that the men fear the retribution of a transcendent divinity (see Schäfer 1999c, 331 ff.), which is, after all, believed to be present in the premises of the village during the *mase* celebration and could see and hear every man's movements. The following answer refutes such an idea:

KD: Do the men think that god, or Kirimo, can see them, or that he hears them, or is close to them?

SG: No, men do not think that way. They think of it as *etɔnya*.

KD: And literally *etɔnya* means to fall down, to make a mistake?

SG: It is making a mistake. You know, normally we are afraid of *bijɔɔri* (uninitiated boys) and women. For example, if you grunt, and a woman hears it, or you *elilija* (the *batana*'s yodel), it is the *bijɔɔri* and the women who hear it who are the cause of you running into troubles.

The idea that the men through initiation enter into a personal relationship with a transcendent being – analogue to the Christian belief – may be misleading. The Batemi consider the laws of Kirimo rather like a mechanism, a natural law which is working independently of a man's good or bad intentions. This law is effective without respect to mitigating circumstances that contributed to or even caused a transgression, nor does it reckon the display of remorse over one's actions. Neither the elders, nor the age-mates reprimand a man who falls short of keeping the Kirimo law (which is different from committing a wrong against another person). The *benamijye* simply acknowledge the fact that it has happened and carry out the ritual that remedies the man.

Indeed the men find themselves caught in a dilemma, because how should they warn an age-mate or talk about the danger if they cannot speak about Kirimo and its secret out of fear to commit treason? Should they speak of it, how can they be sure that they are not overheard by women or uninitiated youth? For the men of the younger age-sets, one way to obviate such transgressions is to spend much of their time in each other's company, away from children and women.

While the men in the village undergo a transformation in their moral behaviour with the *gighɔba kya miseera*, the elders are preparing the next *ghɔɔɔu*. Each properly

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

executed ceremony brings them closer and closer to the climax of the religious season, the *mase* festival. Only if the build-up to *mase* is successful, that is, each *ghorou* performed according to the precepts of their ancestors, can *mase* become a satisfying affair. In fact, if these preceding *ghorou* are not performed, ‘Kirimo cannot enter the village. These celebrations are necessary for *Monto Mukolo* to be welcomed.’<sup>15</sup>

Another aspect of the *ghorou* calendar is that the ceremonies are bracketed on the one hand by the obligatory procession of a delegation of pure people who carry offerings to the main temple in Raghari, but also by a cleansing ritual which is called *elambola*. This ritual is performed by the members of the *etongu* alone. A sheep or goat is slaughtered and the skin is used to fumigate the air in order to ‘erase what came before.’<sup>16</sup> Fumigation rituals, such as the *elambola*, are used to remove potential social conflict because of discontent to ensure that the new period in the calendar is peaceful. The *benamijye* want to make sure that there are no feelings of resentment or anger in the village: ‘They cleanse the complaints of the people who said, “I had to give a goat, but did not want to give it, or give millet, or whatever.” So *elambola* is to cleanse that bad-mouthing of the people.’<sup>17</sup> Fumigation rituals are also held after a burial in order to keep the spirits of the dead (*biryooka*) away from the family. A quarrelsome human spirit and ancestral spirits are thus conceived as similarly disruptive to the welfare of the community and can be treated in the same fashion.

Two *kilemela* celebrations provide a further framework into which the entire year is embedded; the *kilemela kya suuha* is celebrated in July at the opening of the new calendar year when the Pleiades constellation appears in the eastern sky, and the year is ended with the *kilemela kya mbele* when it disappears in the West in June of the following year. The period of one year is thus called *kilemela*. The *kilemela* celebrations are carried out by the *benamijye* and the *bakyama* who slaughter eight goats (each village moiety providing four). After the consummation of the meat, the elders burn the carcass and the skin in order to expel the *biryooka* from the village. Honey beer which has been prepared by the *bakyama* is consumed by all participating men in celebration of these seasonal transitions.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview: AG & SG 17 Sep 2013

<sup>16</sup> Interview: AG & SG 30 Apr 2013

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

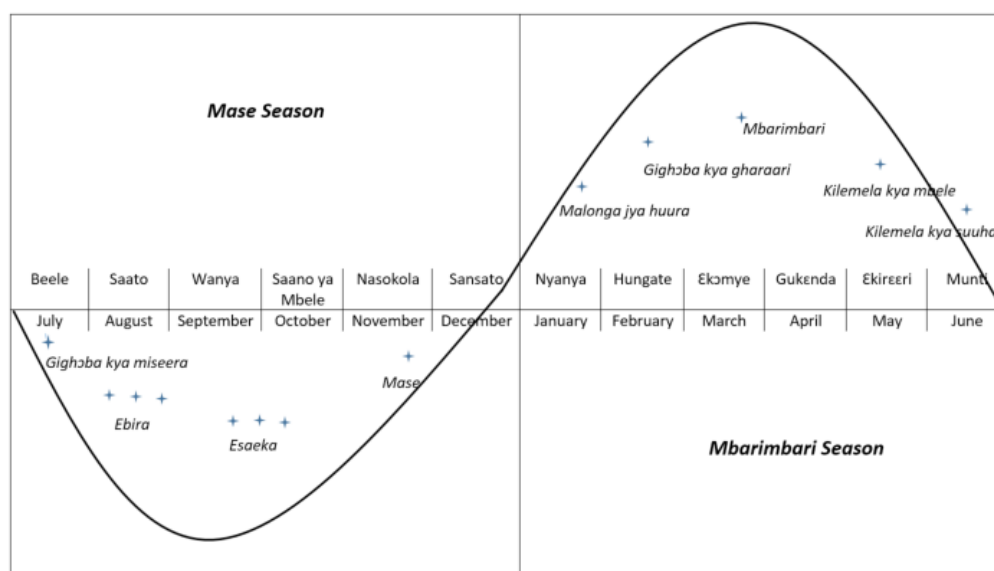


Figure 6.1 Temi ceremonial calendar<sup>18</sup>

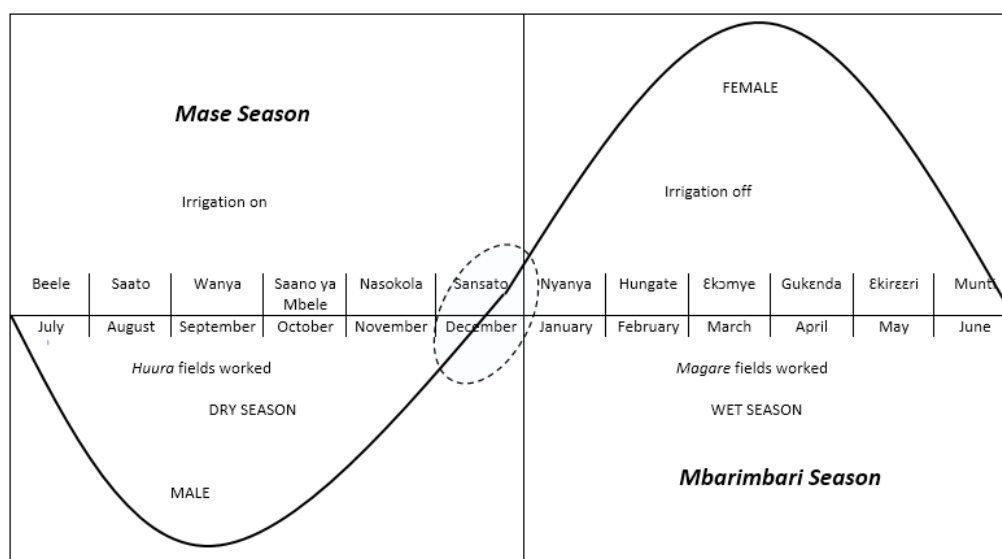


Figure 6.2 Ceremonial cycle and its symbolic forms

<sup>18</sup> The two charts show the movements and associations of the Temi ceremonial cycle. Figure 8 indicates the Gitemi name of the months and the name of the major *ghorou* (ceremonies). The Temi year starts in June (*munti*) with the *kilemela kya suuha* which opens the year with a blessing. Figure 9 shows how the male season (*mase*) co-occurs with the dry season during which the fields are being irrigated, while during the female (*mbarimbari*) season there is rainfall and little need for artificial irrigation. The crucial transition phase from the *mase* to the *mbarimbari* season takes place in December. This threshold period marks the climax of the season and is charged with supernatural dangers.



## 6.6 *Mbarimbari*

The *mase* season ends when the last *mase* celebration has been performed in Soyeta which usually takes place in January. At the end of the *mase* ceremony, the cleansing ritual (*elambola*) is once again performed by the *benamijye*. During the *elambola* ritual the skin of a slaughtered goat is held over a fire and it is believed that the smoke clears the atmosphere of previous social transgressions, accusations, or mischievous spirits. At the same time the ritual prepares the opening of the *mbarimbari* season, thus putting away with the moral restrictions of the Kirimo law and lifting the intense fear of retributive sanctions off the men's hearts and minds. The *mbarimbari* festival itself is sometimes referred to as a harvest ritual (Gray 1963, 109), but in fact it is performed at various months of the year in the six villages and thus is not bound up with the agricultural cycle. In Ebwe *mbarimbari* always takes place in April or May when the *magare* fields are prepared for the rainy season, and the *huura* fields are left fallow.

*Mbarimbari* is preceded by the *elbuli* (or, *olbuli*), the camp of the warrior age-set where they prepare themselves for the ceremony. For a number of weeks the members of the *nsombi* age-set meet in a secluded place to 'fatten up' their bodies and to practise their dancing steps. Over the years that I witnessed *mbarimbari* the intensity of the celebration varied; there were years when the commitment and the participation seemed low, and then a year later there was a revival again.<sup>19</sup> But the general principle is that the members of the first two age-sets are required to participate in *mbarimbari*, and that there is no excuse (*hati mw'eguni*).<sup>20</sup>

The general atmosphere of the *mbarimbari* festival is one of joyful celebration and gregarious fellowship during which people share food and honey beer with each other. There is no restriction of access to their celebrations; in fact, visitors are invited to participate. Especially during the first three days when some of the young men dress up as jesters and entertain the crowds, a jovial atmosphere prevails in the village. Here is an impression of a visit at the dancing plaza by my wife Christine:

I went for the second day of the *mbarimbari* festival. There were a group of about 10 young men dressed in white shorts and capes, their bodies chalked white, and wearing headdresses made of colobus monkey fur. They acted as the jesters to complement the uniform dancing of the larger group of warriors. These jesters were constantly running, chasing children or

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<sup>19</sup> NB 7 May 2002

<sup>20</sup> NB 1 June 2009

playing jokes. A group of them surrounded me, and ‘forced’ me to open my hand to accept some snuff. When I inhaled it, there were gales of laughter as I sneezed and my eyes watered. Afterwards they ran off. Another chalky young man came up to me with an exaggerated limp. He told me how hurt he was, and waited until I had sympathized. Then he said he had to go, and leaped off amidst the laughter of all his ‘sympathisers’. Another young man came up to me, acting drunk. Two words had been scratched into the chalky paint on his chest, the first being ‘*kashesh*’. When I asked the meaning, he told me it was his first name. The laughter of bystanders told me otherwise, but when I asked the meaning, they only replied that it was not a name. Jokes were played on others. Young boys were caught, and water poured over them until they urinated. A fun, relaxed atmosphere.<sup>21</sup>

Yet the celebrations are still kept orderly and peaceful, and any social or moral transgression is considered a grave violation. During the 2009 *mbarimbari* ceremony, for example, three *batana* of the Erigibali age-set insulted some women by singing a derisive song in public. In the song they blamed the women for the extensive drought and lack of food; the youths further alluded that the women ‘smell’ and suggested that they should urinate in the fields so as to water the crops. The incident quickly spread in the entire village and caused great indignation among the women. As soon as *mbarimbari* was over, the women organized themselves and appeared as a crowd before the *etongɔ* elders to demand punishment for the *batana* who insulted them. Moreover, the women threatened to leave the village if their dignity was not re-established through immediate action. The young men were eventually fined and peace in the village resumed.<sup>22</sup>

After the opening days, the jester figures disappear and the dancing is again more uniform. The jesters are called *bananga* and they display bad and shameless behaviour (*bati nsoni*). The *mbarimbari* festival is also called *maghoti jya huura* (the neck/harvest of the *huura* fields) and the purpose is to bring a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the harvest. It dates from an earlier time when the people did not plant the fields above the water canals (*magare*). The *sedani* offering consists of honey beer, goats, maize, or millet, all of which goes to the *ghorɔwane* and is consumed there by the priests.

In the past, the *bananga* jesters used to dance and jest entirely naked, their bodies covered with the white chalk from the *mbarimbari* stone. The *mbarimbari* festival derives its name from the chalk stone which is found at Bigongo, not far from the village. The purpose of the *bananga* is not to frighten or scare the people, but to make them laugh and refresh the atmosphere, a clownish play with the people. And yet, after the two days of fooling around, on the third day of the festival, the elders sacrifice a

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<sup>21</sup> NB 19 May 2001

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

sheep and pray to the Bagwe that this kind of foolish behaviour will be banished from the community.

The *mwenamijye* who is accompanying the group of *baghɔrɔwane* to Raghari at the beginning of the *mbarimbari* festival, will, upon his return to the village of Ebwe put some white chalk on his forehead and on his feet. Moreover, should any man need to travel on these first two days of the festival, he will also put a spot of *mbarimbari* chalk on his forehead as a sign that he participated in the feast.

As a background to these jesters is the serious dancing, with warriors painted red on their heads, shoulders, and upper backs. During the afternoon they all don thin aluminium ‘swords’ on their foreheads, held in place by a headband. Each warrior has his long stick, and wears his newly greased goatskin around his waist. The young girls are dressed in clean *kangas* (tunics). During the singing, which is continuous, teenage girls pick out warriors and dance facing them. The warriors whip their long sticks over the girls’ heads, who stare very intently, their hands holding the ends of their *kangas* in front of their hips. The verb *eghuujja* means to dance. When the women join the men, it is *eghuujja*. That is, the women’s dance is seen as the compliment to the men’s. Older women stand on the edge of the dancing field, looking admiringly at the young men.<sup>23</sup>

During the resting periods, each age-set meets at different places to recuperate from the arduous dancing efforts and to eat food prepared by members of their own group. This resting period under large fig trees is also the time for semi-formal debates about the state of their *gitemi* tradition and where it needs improvement. With the older age-sets where the men have already consumed some honey beer, these proceedings are a mixture between comical staging and serious issues. At times, a drunk man whose anger about the decline of *gitemi* customs erupts in a forceful speech has to be calmed down and brought to sit down again, so that others have a chance to respond.

*Mbarimbari* is considered by some men to be the most important of their ceremonies:

This celebration of *mbarimbari* is the most important for us. If it goes to Raghari, they go to Raghari to be prayed for. And here, up above (at the temple), the elders pray, because that is where they bring the beer. Indeed when they go to pray, that is the most important and indeed it is what gives birth to the Batemi.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> NB 19 May 2001

<sup>24</sup> Interview: Salia Ngwedie 26 Jan 2009

The *batana* certainly do take central stage through their dancing and jumping contests, and it needs to be concluded that one goal of *mbarimbari* is to affirm their role as protectors of the community. The manner in which the age-sets playfully compete in their dances indicates that *mbarimbari* also serves to confirm the age grade system and its hierarchy. And finally, *mbarimbari* has to be seen as a complementary celebration to the more sombre and opaque *mase* ritual with its secrecy and exhibition of male violence.

## 6.7 Clearing the way for *mase*

When the *benamijye* are asked about their most demanding and difficult task, they mention the preparations of *ghorou* before any other, such as the managing of the irrigation system, or their judiciary activity of resolving legal conflicts.<sup>25</sup> With the beginning of the New Year and entering into the *mase* season, these preparations occupy much of their time. For the village of Ebwe, the *benamijye* administer three temple sites within the *kaaya* premises and one outside at a place called Eyasi. The sacred site in Eyasi is called *mwēne* and lies around five kilometres south-west of Ebwe. Thick bushland surrounds a thatched shelter (*mutala*) built over a large rock. The *ghorou* to *mwēne* is a procession from Ebwe to Eyasi with participants chosen by the *etongɔ*. At least one *mwenamijye* accompanies the group. There at the rock a goat is slaughtered and consumed and the rock is anointed with goat fat. The place serves the people of Ebwe as a pilgrimage for prayers, personal needs or petitions for private endeavours. It is believed that the Bagwe who currently reside in Ebwe have come from this place. This *ghorou* in Eyasi is the first of a series of ceremonies which are conceived of as ‘sweeping and cleaning the way’ for the arrival of Kirimo.<sup>26</sup> This image of clearing the path, preparing the way in connection with a *ghorou* is also associated with the work of the main temple priests, the *baghorowane* who are also called the *bahageeri* (the sweepers).

After the procession to Eyasi, the following *ghorou* is called *ebira* (v., to apply a substance, anoint), in which the holy *maghasi* stones (representing the Bagwe) in the temple huts are smeared with goat fat. These stones are believed to be the sons of

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<sup>25</sup> Interview: Masando Sediyya 8 June 2011

<sup>26</sup> Interview: SG 23 Sep 2014

Ghambageu<sup>27</sup> and are kept in each of the *ghorwane*. During this ceremony that is also called *gighoba ky'ebira babyaari* (the ritual of anointing the progenitors), *bijwori* (uninitiated boys between five and ten years old) are chosen to help cover these fist-sized stones with goat fat. According to Masando Sediyya, the Bagwe used to communicate via these *maghasi* stones to the people. Each time they were smeared with fat, they would answer with: '*Hau!*' (Amen).<sup>28</sup> This is the only time in the year when these stones are taken outside of the complete darkness inside the *ghorwane* into the daylight. The stones are wrapped into goatskins to be transported to the courtyard where the anointment takes place. The fat is skimmed off from the boiling soup containing the goat meat and smeared onto the stones. Once the work is finished and the stones returned, the men are feasting on the meat and honey beer. The same procedures are carried out in all the *ghorwane* temples; those of Mesaga, Ghulubeda, and Gooko. ES who had participated as a boy in an *ebira* ritual remembers a large number of smaller stones, around 200, and a few larger ones which were wrapped in goatskin (*egwatya njaghamba gighoba*).<sup>29</sup> Another contributor, AK, recalls how as a boy he found a perfectly round-shaped, shining rock on the path. Upon picking it up and showing it to his grandmother, she quickly wrapped it in a cloth and brought it to one of the temple priests who then carefully carried it into the *ghorwane* and placed it with the other *maghasi* stones on the *buseele bwa nkoma*, a special wooden platform in the inner sanctuary of the temple.

It is there where Karutyase lives, that is where I found the stone. White! And with something like water inside it. I brought it to my grandmother. When I brought it, she started to weep and to rebuke it. "Why have you (god) come to appear to my child? Have you come to reveal yourself completely? You have revealed yourself to the child, now what do you require?" It refused (to answer). She took millet, then folded leather, and put the stone inside. She put something like one dish of millet in there. She poured it inside the leather. She covered the stone. Then she took me by the hand and we went to a man called Lesagi, the priest. He was still strong, though not young. He could walk quickly. When he arrived, he began trembling.

Now the grandmother was already old, older than him. My grandmother was Shabai, the older ones. She said to him, "Come here." She had placed the stone in the leather. She said, "Look, look. What is this? Why do they appear, and lay in wait for my child to come by?" He took a ceremonial whisk (*nghati*) and began singing. He sang:

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<sup>27</sup> One myth, found in the appendix, tells of how Ghambageu, being displeased with his sons, turned them into stones.

<sup>28</sup> Rec: SM 26 Feb 2010

<sup>29</sup> Lit. 'to catch or grab the leader in a piece of leather'. Interview: ES 6 Feb 2004

*Kerya ndiye Ryoba, kerya. Kerya ... Obaturoha masahu ... Obatukola eghoti kania, ryolo ngo ndubakuleeta kaaya. Nobekera nsenge. Unyu zmiise mwana oyo le, kamusabye.*

Arise, you who are Ryoba, arise, arise. You have come to help us. You have encountered and protected us at the entry gates. Now we have brought you home. You have come from the wilderness. Now bless this child, and cleanse him.

Then he called another child from the *ghorowane*. He told him, "Accept this other child (AK) as your own relative." He took him and brought him away. He carried along fat, he gave it to that youth. He anointed the boulder, and said, "*Koma nja Ryoba*," he started singing, "*Koma nja Ryoba na Mwēeri...*" (Sacred stones of Sun and Moon). As the youth entered, the *mughorowane* entered after him singing.<sup>30</sup>

The sacred stones in the *ghorowane* temple are not potent in themselves, but it is believed that the Bagwe communicate via these objects, i.e. that they are the channel through which the divinities speak to the priests. The *baghorowane* invoke the names of Ryoba, *Mwēeri*, Ghulubeda and Mesaga to draw near and speak to them. They plead with the higher order Bagwe to communicate with them, since the *maghasi* stones themselves are not speaking.

*Njaghamba Ryoba nyokolela na Mesaga. Watuhesya wa duhere batigambaga. Otuheere bagwe batigambaga. Babookire kulehu. Babooka eghoti lya bwēelō.*

You hero-gods Ryoba and Mesaga. The stones you have given us do not speak. They came from far away. They come from the entrance of the wilderness.<sup>31</sup>

This invocation of divine powers for support in times of need resembles the actions of the *mutalongi* elder who calls upon Kirimo during the *mase* festival.<sup>32</sup> The sacred stones in the temple hut do not represent the Bagwe's presence, as much as the channel through which they communicate with their divinities. The residence of the powerful gods is not nearby, it is in the wilderness, or just 'far away'. The Temi gods thus live near the people in the temple, yet they are also far away. The ambivalent relationship the Batemi have with their Bagwe is also shown in the fact that the temple huts are located at some distance from the village centre (except for the Gooko temple which is considered the 'female' god ministering especially to the women) because the Bagwe do not like the smell of people.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Interview: AK 5 Sep 2012

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> More details on this in chapter 7

<sup>33</sup> Interview: MS 26 Feb 2010

Following the *ebira* rituals is the *esaeka* (v., to thatch) or *masaeka ghɔrɔu*. The purpose of *esaeka* is the repair or renewal of the temple thatch, a task which is undertaken by older women with the help of girls. Unlike the normal Temi houses, the *ghɔrɔwane* temples have a thatched roof that reaches down all the way to the floor, so that there is no light pouring through the plastered sidewalls like in other houses. The long grasses for the thatch are not always readily available in the vicinity of the village and often have to be collected in distant places.

The activities of this *ghɔrɔu* are performed by women, and it is indeed their *ghɔrɔu* as they get a chance to contribute gifts to the Bagwe. In the words of AK:

The *esaeka* ritual is a special service that involves all villages, but it is for the women. All women above the age of 18 can participate, or even smaller girls can accompany their mothers. The ritual is an offering, an annual offering towards the Bagwe. The name for the offering is *gighɔba*. It is a special offering because even if somebody is sick, the woman will mention it while she puts on the straw. She will say as a prayer: “Remember when I went to cut the grass for the *ghɔrɔwane*.” So whenever there is a problem, it is remembered in this offering.<sup>34</sup>

In September of 2014 I was invited to attend the *esaeka* celebration at the Ghulubeda and Mesaga temples. Because of the extreme drought there was absolutely no grass available as roofing material, so they had to do without. Here is a summary excerpt from my field notes:

On the afternoon of the appointed day of the *ghɔrɔu*, the men who had been asked to prepare *bughɔmani* carried large *nsoha* (calabashes) on their shoulders up the steep hill towards the temple huts where men and a few women began to gather. They just nodded to each other and sat down on a low stonewall which surrounds the terraced courtyard. Henrise, the main priest and a younger man who acted as his assistant were clad in goatskins and barefooted. Diniase, the head of the *etɔngɔ* took a seat on the pile of goat dung on the left of the temple entrance. The calabashes with beer kept coming in and were placed in the middle of the circle in upright positions. The calabashes had different sizes and shapes. All looked much used and blackened on the lower side. A few were elongated and tall, some were white. Some had markings, little signs or ornaments. While most of the two dozen men were quietly waiting – each one holding his own drinking vessel (*kibuyu*), in his hands some elders were nervously giving directions where to put down the *nsoha*. Lukasise, an elder whom I knew well from the water project, arrived with two *nsoha* on his shoulders. He was in good spirits, whistling and joking around.

The men (a few *benamijye*, others were *bakyama*) sat in groups according to the village side they belonged to (Bisone and Mulongo). Then two members of each group started to take turns pointing to the calabashes they claimed as theirs. They took them from the middle and placed them aside. Finally, two hours after we arrived, they were ready to pour the beer. Two further men were asked to assist with the pouring. Wide leather straps were attached to the mouth of the *nsoha*. The assistants had to remove their shoes or sandals to be eligible for this task. They held the large calabash with beer on their thigh and poured

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<sup>34</sup> Interview: AK 17 Sep 2013

the beer into a small *kibuyu*. Some beer was spilled but that did not seem to matter. Everybody watched them in anticipation of what was to come next. The elder with the goatskin sat next to the entrance of the *ghorwane*. He was told to move over to the threshold of the *ghorwane*, but he refused. While being busy with the *nsoha*, stuffing straw taken from the *ghorwane* thatch into the calabash's neck, his cape moved and revealed his genitals; but neither he nor anyone seemed to care about it, despite the two women present.

Diniase and one other elder were the first to get a little bit of beer in a *kyaho* (a halved calabash). Diniase sipped the beer without a prayer or blessing. Then the one elder with the goatskin approached me with a *kyaho* of beer and said: “*Mwana* (child), this is a blessing for you. Drink it (or actually: eat it). I am now your father!” The beer was fresh and sweet, it tasted good. The preparations continued for at least another half hour, so I was drinking on my own, sipping the beer slowly. The elder who had handed me the beer watched me from the other side and encouraged me to drink. Later, when they all were drinking, others came to me and poured beer from their *kibuyu* into my dish and said: “This is a blessing.”

Once they were all served, there was a short time of enjoying the beer. Everyone started to become more animated. Then Matei stood up in front of the entrance, facing the group. He started to wave the *nghati* (a ceremonial whisk made from a wildebeest tail) and chant a prayer, calling upon Mesaga and Ghulubeda, the two gods of the *ghorwane* temples. The group responded each prayer sequence with “*hau*” (Amen). The women ululated briefly. An older white haired, robust woman, dressed in a cape, who was standing near the entrance, raised her voice, then addressed the group with a prayer request. Some men kept talking, but Matei asked for silence to hear what the woman had to say. Matei then picked up her request and prayed for whatever she asked. The prayer lasted a few minutes. After the prayer, people resumed their drinks and a young man started to intonate a chorus. “*Hee, hee, Mugwe atumise...*” (God bless us), and others joined in. Three women started to dance, one young man joined in with them, making funny rhymes to amuse the others. Two of the women moved toward me and bent over me with their shoulder touching mine in an invitation to join them. After another ten minutes, some of the men picked up their drinking gourds and started to descend the steep pathway. The elders abruptly asked me to finish my beer; they wanted to leave as well.<sup>35</sup>

In comparison to the long period of preparing the feast, the actual time of enjoyment was not of long duration (although it could be that the lack of thatching grass may have dampened their spirits). As with other *ghorwu*, though, the participants were carrying on the celebration in their own homes where they invited friends and neighbours to drink with them.

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<sup>35</sup> NB 19 Sep 2014



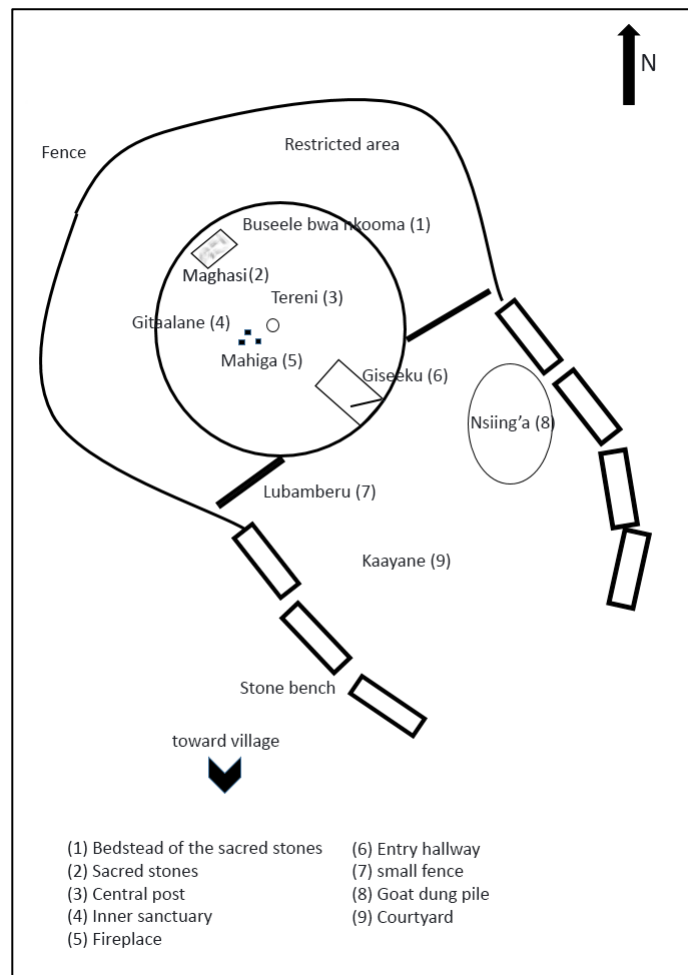


Figure 6.3 Sketch of a *ghawane* (KD)

After all the temple huts are thatched (Ghulubeda, Mesaga, and Gooko), the women also thatch the *mutala jwa kijoomi*, the thatched shelter inside the sacred grove that is at other times only accessible to initiated men. This *mutala* is the place where the novices sleep during, and receive their instruction after, the rite of passage. Yet now the women are allowed in there and it is again – after the thatching of the *ghawane* huts – their privilege to put fresh grass on the hut. Once they are finished thatching, the pathway is cleared for the entrance of Kirimo into the village.

During these preparatory rituals, the *ghawane* as a location, and also involving its personnel, plays a central role. Everything is done in relation to the Bagwe who are believed to reside at these places; the sacred stones receive a new coat of fat in order to preserve them, the roofs of the temples are renewed to shelter them, and the Bagwe are called upon to bless the community. But at the end of these *ghawane* there is a sudden break of religious direction. With the advent of the *mase* festival the centre of attention shifts to another cult. All of a sudden, it is Kirimo that takes centre stage. The locus of the religious activities is no longer at the *ghawane*, and the priests no longer play an

administrative role. There is a curious ambiguity in this transition of one religious mode to another which no Mutemi was able to explain satisfactorily, except for restating the necessity of these preparatory activities:

The point is that all the *ghorowu* preceding *mase* are in preparation for the *Monto Mukolo* to come. They are the reason why he cannot enter before, they prevent him from coming. So they are moving along and always coming closer to the time when he comes. So the *benamijye* are in an important position doing important work of preparing, setting things right for the *Monto Mukolo*.<sup>36</sup>

An attempt to explain the differences between the *ghorowane* activities and those concerning Kirimo are given in the following comment:

There is a holy place at the *ghorowane* where you cannot enter when you are not clean. Just like the spring area (*biiso*) is sacred, because you cannot enter it. But *mase* is there to fulfil the law, the law that is given by Kirimo. The women are also supposed to keep the law of the *ghorowane*, the taboos. But *mase* only concerns men, because it has to do with the laws which the men are afraid to break. If you break one of these laws, you will die. Another difference is that at *mase* no man is prevented from participating, there is no moral constraint, as it is the case with *ghorowane* who have to be clean. *Mase* divides people differently: *bijwori* (children), women, and *Baturi* (the clan of smiths) are restricted from access. This has to do with the secret of the men. It is so that they continue to honour, to protect these laws and rules. Therefore there is really nothing sacred about it.<sup>37</sup>

As so many other aspects of Temi culture, the two cults can be seen as complementary sides, thus combining an older religious tradition with a newer one, one that serves primarily the women and one which is for the men through which they construct their masculinity. The pursuit of this question about the relationship between the *ghorowane* beliefs and practices and those surrounding Kirimo will be taken a step further in chapter 6 when discussing the *mase* ceremony.

## 6.8 The role of the *ghorowane*

According to Masando Sediyya, when the Batemi settled in the valley west of Lake Natron, they already came with their Bagwe. He explains how Ghambageu brought the sacred stones to Ebwe:

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<sup>36</sup> NB 17 Sep 2013

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

In the West is Ghambaghwani, Ghambageu's father. Is he not the one who is above all who made all things? Is he not the eldest? All things come from here and go there to Ghambaghwani. Afterwards Ghambageu got up, he went to bring the holy stones. He brought the holy stones to Raghari. He brought Ghulubeda. He was asked, "Where are you going?" He answered, "I am going to Ebwe."<sup>38</sup>

Except for such occasional, sometimes incoherent references to the Bagwe's origin there is not much detailed in-depth genealogy available. Henrise, the Ghulubeda priest only insists that it was Ghambageu who inducted the *ghorowane* institution.<sup>39</sup> As mentioned before, the *baghorowane* priests are subordinated to the *benamijye* in terms of socio-political powers. The *etongɔ* council can command the priests to carry out religious duties within the reasonable understanding of the *gitemi* traditions. When it comes to the temple premises themselves, it is the priest alone who is in charge and the *benamijye* are not able to overrule them.<sup>40</sup> In Ebwe there is at least one *mughorowane* for each of the three temples. Their main task is to keep the place in order and to be available to provide help to anybody who approaches the *ghorowane*. There are two things that always need to be present at the *ghorowane*: a fire and goats. The fire which is started with a *lurende* stick (not with matches) is burning from evening until morning. Goats are given to the *ghorowane* as gifts or offerings for their own use. Should a *ghorowane* lack goats, the *etongɔ* will provide them. Another rule is that only natural materials are allowed inside the temple; that is, no plastic or aluminium containers, modern clothing, or tools are to be carried into the sanctuary. When entering the temple hut, the priest is only wearing a leather cape and is barefoot. All tools and utensils (e.g. knives or pots) are to be provided to the *ghorowane* by the Baturi smiths, a sub-clan living in each village.

An important task of the priest is to sweep the house every morning, to remove the goat dung and put it on the pile outside. Furthermore, he is to perform the daily morning and evening prayers. Each morning at sunrise, for example, Henrise (who is also in charge of the Mesaga temple) is praying for the welfare and prosperity of the village community:

*Hai baaba nyɔnkɔlɛla na kujɔkɛrya muheera.*

Oh Father, I am calling on you and return thanks to

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<sup>38</sup> Interview: MS 7 June 2010

<sup>39</sup> Interview: Henrise 7 June 2010

<sup>40</sup> For example, the *etongɔ* had granted my request to enter the inner rooms of a *ghorowane*, but when Henrise heard about it, he refused to accommodate me without the *etongɔ*'s consent. The elders had to accept his decision. NB 13 Sep 2012

you.

*Nobambookya nde saayo mbira luga.*

You woke me with peace to apply fat on the tendon (good health).

*Ngetela naehuma, najwagisya njwagisye na mata jayyo.*

Go before me when I leave. And when I return I shall return with your blessing.

*Nahira busyo bwayyo halya nkeletya ndabate nyama na bughwani.*

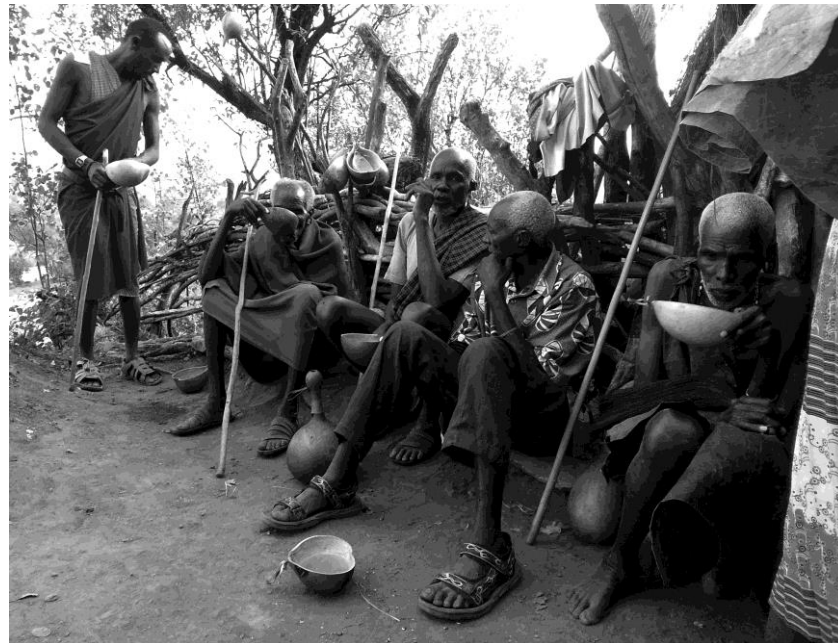
I carry your face (presence) so that wherever I go I get meat and beer.

*Monto olya nkejagha na nene ninjaghane na muhenji ndagele kung'woreera ng'wore'ehondola.*

The person I meet shall be a friend so that I eat until evening when I return.

*Ong'etele ondendele ng'wore' ejwaka.*

Go before me to protect me until I return.



Photograph 6.1 Henrise (right) with fellow celebrants during a ghwou (KD)

At times, the *baghwane* may issue a prophetic word to the community and its leaders; for example, when the first secondary school in Butemine was in the planning in the late 1990s, a great number of Batemi opposed this modern institution. But one of the *muhageeri* of Raghari warned the community not to refuse BUDEA's (Butemine Development Association) request to build on village property. He remembered an old story which prophesied that one day people of different ethnic backgrounds would drink from the same water source. In another case, a priest in Ebwe admonished the *etongo* not to act harshly against the Christians (not to curse them) because he could see that the church would eventually establish itself as a permanent institution.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> NB 27 Oct 2001

While the *baghɔrɔwane* are generally believed to be clean and holy men, there is another side to them which shows them in a different light. In their position as mediators between the Bagwe and the common people, they occupy a position of power which can corrupt them. The priests are in charge of a medicine called *bitana*, a magical substance which can be used to repair family relationships or to heal a person, but also to cause misfortune to others. The medicine consists of the fat of goat intestines (*nsunya*) and is kept in storage at the *ghɔrɔwane*. The fat is applied (secretly or openly, depending on the purpose of its use) to the patient with the expectation that it effects the desired change. In principle, a petitioner who approaches the *mughɔrɔwane* with a request for *bitana* has to explain his or her problem and why the medicine is needed. It is common practice, though, that the *mughɔrɔwane* issues *bitana* medicine to anyone who requests it as he gets paid for each delivery. On top of ‘selling’ some magic medicine, he is often bestowed with a gift of thanksgiving if the medicine has proven successful. It has been known that people repeatedly practise *bitana* magic against each other, buying the medicine from the same priest.

In Ebwe, the priests are recruited from the Guraro clan. Henrise, aged in his mid-60s, supervises the Ghulubeda temple. He is presently the oldest priest. He is supervising Rehema of the Mesaga temple, a younger man in his 30s from the Erigibali age-set. The pedagogic method reflects the one used in the *etɔngɔ*; the older, more experienced men coach the younger ones by trial and error method. In 2000 Henrise had taken over the post of the head priest after his uncle Dawalase had died.<sup>42</sup> He worked as a priest until a recent incident forced the *etɔngɔ* to indict him. Henrise had struck his own son with a stick on the head so that the boy died of the injury. The reason for the excessive physical abuse was that his son had neglected the goats on the Sumine pastures. Henrise was replaced by another man from the Guraaro clan, Barkyeli, a much younger man of the Erumagero age-set. Barkyeli had been appointed by the District government as a local liaison for the government’s HIV/Aids programme, and thus occasionally was invited to educational seminars held in Loliondo.<sup>43</sup> Henrise kept teaching and assisting Barkyeli, but was not allowed to manage the priestly affairs on his own. In July 2012 a fire almost completely destroyed the Mesaga temple (which was also under Barkyeli’s supervision). Apparently one of Barkyeli’s boys had caused the fire and Barkyeli, as his parent, was held responsible for it. As a consequence, it was

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<sup>42</sup> NB 6 Apr 2005

<sup>43</sup> NB 3 Apr 2009

decided that Barkyeli should leave the position and Henrise be reinstalled again. These re-shuffles in the religious regime, as well as on the political leadership side, are quite normal and are not considered extraordinary events. As emergency measures, these positions are filled with a trustworthy person until a better solution is found.

A fully functioning and staffed *ghorowane* is of great importance for every Temi village. An emergency situation may occur at any time to any villager, and the *baghorowane* need to be accessible to the people and intercede for them. It became apparent how crucial the role of the *ghorowane* was during the aforementioned fire. An immediate emergency call was issued and the social life of the entire village came to a standstill. No ceremony or private celebration was to be held until the temple was rebuilt. Every age-set was recruited to help the rebuilding process, and each group was ordered to provide certain building materials. The men constructed the walls, the middle posts and the roof, while the women were in charge of the thatching. Only when the temple hut was resurrected and its interior properly covered could normal village routine resume.<sup>44</sup>

## **6.9 *Bughamani* and its place in Temi society**

Honey beer (*bughamani*) carries an equally significant symbolic and material value in Temi social life. Without it a *ghorou* is hardly conceivable. Honey beer is also a standard component of blessings or curses, and is sometimes used as a libation to the ancestors. Because *bughamani* is of such importance in their ritual context, there are naturally associated domains which automatically become important to the Batemi, such as the *muringaringa* trees from which the beehives are carved, the wilderness where the beehives are placed, and the trees into which they are hoisted. Beekeeping also requires the skills and knowledge of how to read the behaviour of bees, how to gather honey, and of course, how to make the beer.

Honey is considered a gift from Mugwe not unlike the rain or the seasonal harvest. It is Mugwe's providence that allows them to harvest honey from the beehives, and if there is a lack of honey it is equally accepted as God's ruling. According to their beliefs, the ritual use of honey beer was introduced by Ghambageu when he invested the elders with political power and taught them how to share *bughamani* and drink it out of

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<sup>44</sup> NB 22 Sep 2014

calabashes (cf. Schäfer 1999c, 33–35). The consummation of honey beer during a *ghorou* is therefore not simply an intoxicating beverage to enhance the celebratory mood. If that would be the case, they could use the *busa* beer that is produced from millet or maize and is always available at a much cheaper cost. But for the proper celebration of a *ghorou* there is no substitute for honey beer.

Beekeeping, including the production of beehives, the harvesting of honey, and the making of honey beer is entirely a man's business. Women may be entitled to drink honey beer, but they are not part of the production process. Not even the gathering of firewood for brewing can be done by women. A boy is introduced in early childhood to the importance of beehives when he accompanies his father on trips out into the wilderness to check on the state of the beehives or to assist him with the gathering of honey. When approaching adulthood, the ability to collect honey from a beehive is one of the tests each boy undergoes. It can be dangerous, as the beehives are often placed high up in a tree, as SG describes it:

If you go to collect honey you need a *ngogolo* (honey bag), a *kihande* (firestick), matches, *mughoba* (leather strap); the *kihande* is for the fire, so if you climb the tree, before you open the hive, you start to blow on the *kihande* which produces a very strong smell which the bees do not like. The heat of the fire loosens the glue which holds the cork of the hive. The bees will move to the back of the hive. You put the *ekuneku* (lid, cork) on top of the hive. You take the *kilaboka* (branch of a candelabra tree) and put the fluid on the hot glue which still sticks around the mouth of the hive, so that when you stick your arm into the hive you will not get burned. You continue to blow smoke into the hive. The bees will be afraid and you can collect the honey. If the bees attack you, more smoke is needed. You leave a rest of the honey to the bees. At the end there is another task, to check if any honey has dropped onto the lower part, the *kiboyo kya nse*. This is important because if you leave honey there it will rot and the bees leave. So you need to clean the lower part carefully.

KD: Why do you not use gloves for this?

SG: Some do, but the elders say this is not good because of the smell. But even if you use you will be stung. The only protection is the cloth with which you cover your face leaving only a small opening for the eyes and mouth to blow the smoke into the hive. It is really hard work. If you are done you put the lid back and close it up again. You cannot throw away the fire stick before you have climbed down the tree, because the bees are still aggressive and can attack you, even if you are on the ground. So you climb down carefully and then put out the fire.

KD: Do accidents happen?

SG: Yes, the bees are very dangerous and can follow you. They can throw you off the tree. The bees can start stinging you on the feet and legs until you jump off the tree.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Interview: SG 13 Oct 2014

Until today, the Batemi have rejected modern methods of beekeeping which had been introduced to them by Tanzanian government officials. Their old ways have proven more effective and reliable than wooden boxes which are hung in a tree with a rope. The *muringaringa* tree from which the beehives are carved 'belong' to the *etongo*, and the *benamijye* control the felling of these trees. The trees are not considered sacred in themselves, but they are of special value to the elders because they provide the durable material for the beehives. Heavy fines are issued to any misconduct relating to the *muringaringa* trees.

The *benamijye* follow a special timetable regarding the cutting of *muringaringa* trees. They had cut some last year (2013). So at certain times they check the size of the *muringaringa* trees and usually wait 8-10 years before cutting them again. The place they cut them is in the *huura* fields. A mature tree bears fruits called *ng'ong'ɔ jya maringiringa*. The birds love to eat these fruits. And the birds spread the seeds of the tree in other places. When it rains the seeds sprout and will become visible. The *benamijye* walk around in the fields and if they find a sapling of the *muringaringa* tree they cut a stick and place it into the ground to mark that the tree is claimed by the *etongo*. Nobody is allowed to touch that tree, to uproot it or damage it.<sup>46</sup>

The decision to cut down *muringaringa* trees lies with the *etongo* as a unit, not with individual members of the council. Because of a surplus of available trees, the wood is used for other purposes like making doors and doorframes. In any case, it is the elders who decide, and also supervise the cutting of the trees. For this task they employ some *batana* who are rewarded with food and drink for their work.

When the time of cutting down *muringaringa* trees has come, the *benamijye* gather together; they will ask some young men to help them cutting the trees. The tree is divided up according to seniority in the council, Diniase as the chief gets the largest part, starting at the bottom of the tree stump, then the next senior *mwenamijye* takes his piece etc. until there is a piece called *syagha* which is the last piece of the tree, the smallest piece; this goes to the young men who felled the tree. It is a gift to the *batana*.<sup>47</sup>

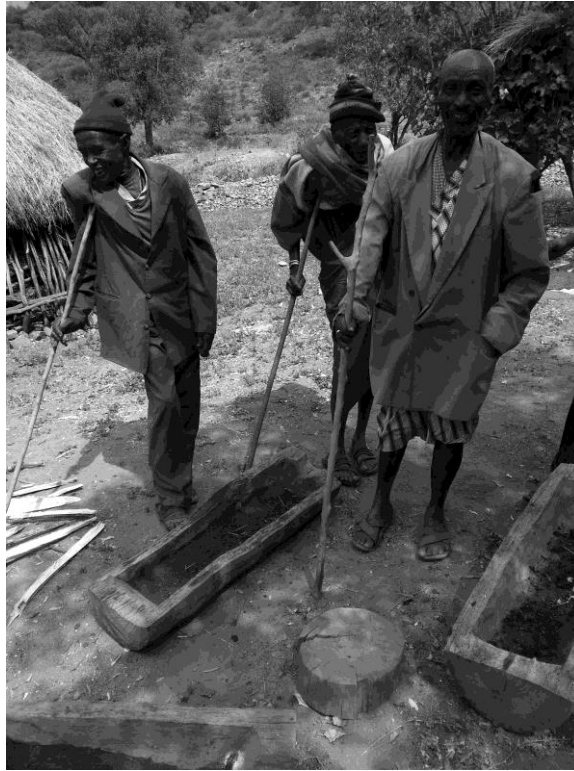
The carving out of the wooden pieces to give it a hollow space is done by the elders with special tools, a metal scraper called *ghɔnɔsi* and a small axe called *eghondoro*. Only when the two pieces of the beehive (*kiboyo ky'egolo* and *kiboyo kya nse*) are put together do they form a unit. The beehive is also a metaphor of gender relations, as the activity of gathering honey is an allusion to sexual intercourse.

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<sup>46</sup> Interview: SG 25 Sep 2014

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.





Photograph 6.2 Ebwe benamijye with beehives ready to be transported to the wilderness (KD)

Men can brew honey beer for their own private consumption any time. But when a man is assigned to bring a *sedani* to a *ghorou*, the preparation and handling of this offering is treated with great care. An offering of honey beer toward the *ghorowane* or the *etongo* is called *kiseejo kiseri* (a clean pot), because the beer is brewed and stored in a large clay pot. During the entire process of making the beer, only the man who was assigned to bring the offering is allowed to touch the vessels (honey bag and clay pot). In the house, the beer is stored in a special place on the *lutala* (shelf) and nobody in the family is allowed to touch it. SG described the beer making process with the following words:

There is a special kind of *kiseejo* called *kiseejo kiseri*. This kind is prepared and stored in a special way; the women and children are not allowed to touch it. If you know that you want to prepare a *kiseejo kiseri* you take a *ngogolo* (honey bag) and clean it at the stream, then you collect honey. Once you have got the honey; if the *ngogolo* is covered you are not allowed to open it again until you reach your home (you can eat at the beehive, though). Even when you are at home, you do not open the bag and give honey to anyone. At home you take the *sedani*, wash it, and then a person who is *monto museri* (clean person) is pouring the honey from the bag into the *sedani*. The same man will take the *kiseejo* and put it into its place (*ntala egolo*). There it is stored until used, this can be for months. This kind of honey is meant for a special occasion, usually a *ghorou* at the *ghorowane*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Interview: SG 13 Apr 2013

The brewing process takes place over the next two days with the brewer's unwavering attention to a constantly burning fire underneath the shelving upon which the beer pot sits. After the brew has cooled down it is ready to be brought to the *ghorɔwane* or to be consumed at a private gathering.

The Batemi consider honey beer not just as a beverage, for them it is food. A Temi man may call on his friends, saying: *Tusoore byeelya bwæelɔ!* (Let us go and look for food in the wilderness) (cf. Schiefenhovel and Macbeth 2013). The men are thus looking to satisfy their appetite in the wilderness rather than being nourished from the produce of their home land. To be considered a man among the Batemi, among other things, means to have several beehives and to contribute honey beer to the regular ceremonies. A man without any beehives is a ridiculous person and hives thus belong to his most prized possessions. Beehives can be made or bought, but mostly they are inherited from one's father. If a beehive is presented as a gift from one man to another, the two are called *ba muringa* (those of the beehive) and this forms one of the strongest friendship ties possible. Finally, besides the celebratory character of drinking, honey beer is used to ratify agreements between people, to seal promises or inheritance arrangements. Through the consumption of *bughɔmani* after the words of promise or agreement have been spoken, the parties pledge to abide by the terms they have agreed to.

While in general terms drinking *bughɔmani* is the privilege of the older men and women as a show of solidarity with their ancestral traditions and enjoyment of each other's company, there are times when the men of the younger age-sets are entitled to drink honey beer. One such instance is the time when a group of *batana* is recruited by the elders for a special task, for example to carry out a ritual procession to the Eyasi temple, or to cut down *muringaringa* trees and – after the beehives have been carved – carry the hives into the wilderness and hang them into trees. The payment for this kind of labour is *bughɔmani* and goat meat. Otherwise the men are only allowed to drink honey beer once they have graduated from the active warrior-hood stage (*butana*) into elder-hood (*bulakolo*). During the main festivals of *mbarimbari* and *mase*, even children are offered small amounts of *bughɔmani*. But as a rule, the children enjoy the sweet, unprocessed honey when they suck it from the honeycombs. For an adult person on the other hand, the honey has to be processed before it can be consumed.

During our song recording sessions, as is the case in any normal celebratory gathering, a good deal of beer had to be consumed to enter into a pleasurable state of inebriation before the singing of traditional songs could resume. There is no shame for

old people to appear drunk in public; they are still met with respect and would never be reprimanded by younger ones. In recent years, there have been a growing number of local beer clubs where women brew either millet or maize beer and sell it for a low price (200 to 300 TZS for a 3 dl cup, i.e. 0.3 USD). As a result of this easy access to alcoholic beverage, there are mothers with young children who get drunk and neglect their family duties. In Ebwe this behaviour has been disturbing the social peace along the institutional lines and the *bekorani* (leaders of the age-sets) brought their grievances to the village council. The *etongo* in turn summoned the leaders of the female age-sets and reprimanded them for their behaviour. The women leaders were asked to discipline those mothers who neglected their families and deal with the matter accordingly.<sup>49</sup>

Among the Batemi, honey beer is charged with symbolic value. Besides being a means of well-being and social enjoyment, it is their way of communicating with their ancestors. By consuming *bughmani* they express their solidarity with the traditions and affirm the *gitemi* practices handed down to them. But the wider practice and ritual use of *bughmani* also strengthens the authority of the elders because it is they who oversee its production and distribution (Schiefenhovel and Macbeth 2013, 159–69; Willis et al. 2001; cf. Beidelman 1961; Karp 1980).

## 6.10 Conclusion

The Temi ceremonial calendar consists of various *ghorou* and *gighoba* which are types of ceremonies that Corinne Kratz calls ‘complex cultural performance, often dramatic and compelling’ (2010, 15). Ceremonies are ‘multimedia events’ because they communicate in ‘multiple channels and modes’ in which history, cultural objects, and personal experience are intertwined and expressed. Participants of Temi ceremonies may not always be able to verbalize the meaning and purpose of such rituals, and yet ‘ceremonies can be at once a means through which actors understand their lives and interactions, a product of those interactions, and also a force that affects their lives’ (Kratz 2010, 30).

As shown in this chapter, the Batemi are deeply immersed in a world that is structured and marked by rituals which provide them with a sense of continuity of their traditions and history, and give them a sense of stability. Their *ghorou* are dynamic

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<sup>49</sup> NB 2 Apr 2014

enactments of the realities of the tangible world and their ancestral world, reiterating the social and political order according to *gitemi* values.

In Chapter Seven the focus will be on the *mase* ceremony and how it espouses initiation processes with other cultural domains mentioned in this chapter.



## Chapter 7

### 7. *MASE* – REPRODUCING GENERATIONS AND GENDER

*We have to learn to think of societies as continuously ‘flowing’, as a ‘dangerous tide... that never stops or dies... And held one moment burns the hand.’*

Victor Turner, quoting W.H. Auden (1974, 37)

*There is nothing sacred about mase.*

SG in an interview 2012

*Das Blasen des Horns... bindet sie an das Heilige.*

Alfred Schäfer (1999b, 187)<sup>1</sup>

#### 7.1 Introduction

The *mase* ceremony, despite being named as the most important religious festival (Schäfer 1999b, 169), remains elusive as to its nature and exact purpose. Is it a religious festival honouring the Bagwe, is it a subtly disguised demonstration of power by which the men retain their domination over women, or is it simply the Batemi's way of continuing their tradition in order to affirm their identity as distinct from other people? There are a number of references to *mase* to be found in ethnographic literature (Gray 1971; Gray 1963; Gray 1974; Vähäkangas 2008; 2008a; Schäfer 1999c), some of which render contradictory impressions. It is rather paradoxical, for example, that while Gray describes the atmosphere at *mase* as one of 'sobriety and piety rather than of excitement and drunkenness' (1974a, 113), Vähäkangas points out that the celebrations during *mase* 'include some kind of sexual orgy' (2008a, 62). Both reports have in common that neither one was based on reliable data, as both authors rely on hearsay reports. The following chapter attempts to draw a different picture of what the *mase* event is about,

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<sup>1</sup> 'The blowing of the horn ... binds them to the sacred' (KD)

how it relates to other cultural domains, and in what sense it is disconnected from other parts of Temi culture.

There are several reasons why *mase* constitutes a culmination of the Temi calendar. First of all, it is this event for which the elders have so carefully prepared the way for Kirimo to make his presence manifest in the village. Secondly, it is during the *mase* festival when, through ritual performance, gender relations and generation distinctions are emphasised and re-ordered. And lastly, *mase* signals the end of the season of the *Monto Mukolo* and the transition into the *mbarimbari* season which completes the annual cycle. In order to achieve these transformations of the person, society, and season, the Batemi employ spatial arrangements, natural objects, sounds, as well as manipulations, trickery, and occasionally even violence.

Because over the last few decades *mase* has increasingly become a political topic with district government officials and Temi traditional leaders discussing its validity and viability, I will consider how *mase* exists in a delicate and dynamic sphere between public display and concealed actions. I am arguing that *mase* needs both – the space to carry out hidden activities as well as the public spectacle – in order to continue its function as a powerful means to shape Temi identity.

## **7.2 Origin and history of Kirimo**

The history of *mase* is shrouded in narratives which place its origin in the unknown and distant past. In general, Temi myths are too variable and mutable to serve as a guide to chronological events in the people's past. Rather than being employed to reconstruct their history, these myths speak of a world they still inhabit and of social behaviour, gender patterns, and the power of supernatural forces which permeate their society. Some of the stories also feature the names of divinities that are believed to manifest their presence during *mase*. The following story of the origin of *mase* is significant not just as an explanation of how it all began, but because it speaks to those themes which are found across African societies: labour division between men and women, the transformation and reversal of gender roles, and the beginning of religious rituals (Moore, Sanders, and Kaare 2004; Moore 2007; Müller 1989; Cornwall 2005; MacCormack and Strathern 1980). Although the story touches on the root cause of male supremacy, secrecy, and deceit, the story was related to us without the precautions that

one would expect when revealing an important piece of knowledge. This is the version told by AG of Raghari:

Long ago, Kirimo began in Sale when the men went out to dig tubers. At that time there was a famine. After they had finished digging tubers, a man hid his digging stick, which was an old horn. The next day he took it up, and the tip broke off, so he put it back in the tree, where the sun dried it.

In the evening a strong wind came up and blew into the horn so that it spoke. As the people were digging tubers, they were all afraid, including the man whose stick it was. The next day the man wondered to himself why the sound had come from the place where he had hidden his stick. He placed the stick in the same tree, and hid himself nearby. At the same hour of the evening a wind came up and blew the horn.

The horn spoke, and the people scattered in fear. When the people had left, the man came out of hiding and gathered the tubers which they had deserted. That became his means of getting food. Finally he said to himself, "This thing actually frightens people! I should call together a few of my relatives." So he told them, "This thing which frightens people is nothing more than my digging stick!" Because those men wanted to have their own food source they said, "Let us hide all of this from the women." So they called all the grown men together.

They implored the horn as they sang the songs of drunkards, but it refused to speak. They implored it to speak as they sang the songs of the gods, but it refused. They implored it to speak as they sang the songs of the young men's council, but it refused.

They implored it with the songs that are sung nowadays, and it agreed. So they said, "This is the one and only way we will do it." They called together all the grown men in every village with a great shout. All the men came and agreed. Not one disagreed. They said, "Let us hide this thing from the women." Also they agreed not to show the horn to any children. "When they are old enough to enter their age-set, then they will see it." They asked the village elders to watch over the horn. And the horn was called Kirimo.

There was only one horn, so they looked for a second one. That way one horn could be up in the mountains and the other one echoing from a different place. They enfolded it in leather to carry it. So there were two horns. One man was told to stay where he was with the horn, and another man was sent to a different place with his horn. So he blew into it and it spoke.

This is the story of how it started. It started out simply as a man's digging stick for tubers, and in the end it became a means of collecting food. To this very day, that is all it is; Kirimo is nothing more than a means of collecting food.<sup>2</sup>

The inception of the name Kirimo is unknown to the Batemi. It is possible that the name is borrowed from the neighbouring Maasai with whom the Batemi share Mount Oldonyo Lengai as a sacred place. Kirim is the name for the holy mountain where the Maasai bring their offerings and special prayers (Lekundayo 2013, 102–19). There are striking similarities between the groups of women who, accompanied by male guardians, offer their prayers and sacrifices at Oldonyo Lengai (Kirim) as described by Lekundayo and Hodgson (whom he quotes), and the visits of Maasai delegations during the Temi *mase* festival which also consists mostly of women who appeal to Kirimo to

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<sup>2</sup> Rec: AG 6 Jul 2007



restore their health or bless them with children (2013, 109).<sup>3</sup> The women believe that Kirimo's home is on Oldonyo Lengai:

Kirimo, in the women's knowledge, refers to Oldonyo Lengai. That is what they think. So starting in the 7th month they start to anticipate, that is in the counting of the year in Gitemi, so he starts to leave the mountain of the gods in the 7th month, he moves forward, he comes closer until he enters in the 9th month in Eroghata. Once he is in Eroghata, it is known that the 'Old Man' has entered. If he leaves Eroghata and enters Kura, people of Kura will say "the Old Man has come to visit us". So they say that he has left the mountain of the gods, and come to visit us. If he leaves Kura to come to Ebwe, then we will say, "The Old Man has come to visit us." So if a person asks where he has come from, the answer is from the mountain of the gods. That is his headquarters, that is what they say, the mountain of the gods. The Maasai used to go and bring sacrifices there, until this day they have celebrations. They slaughter, they do rituals. But the Batemi have not gone there to do rituals. They say the gods, which is Kirimo, come from there, because that is their headquarters, and come here to visit us. But they have not ever done rituals there. But they believe that Kirimo lives there.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the men were digging for tubers suggests that these events took place before the Batemi started to cultivate fields and keep goats. Furthermore, the mention of men digging up tubers to provide food indicates that the Batemi once lived in a different social order with less dichotomous gender roles. Today, working the fields and providing staple food is clearly a female task and the women are associated with the fields which symbolically stand for female fecundity.

Complementary opposites forming a unity is an important underlying principle of Temi culture. It can be seen in the organization of the villages and clans into moieties, the dichotomy of village and wilderness, and of course, the opposition of male and female. With the Batemi these dichotomies, especially as they concern sexuality and gender, are not much verbalized as we find it in other African societies (Beidelman 1972; Beidelman 1997; Heald 1995; Sanders 2002; Sanders 2008; Hakansson 1998). Sexuality and gender relations nevertheless have a crucial impact as organizing principles of their community. In the above story about the beginning of Kirimo, the horn from which emanates the sound of god is clearly the symbol of male dominance over women, and all other uninitiated members of the community. Without engaging the complex domain of psychoanalysis and applying it to this data, we can posit the horn of Kirimo as the signifying symbol which structures gender relations in Temi society (cf. Moore 2007). How the male practice surrounding Kirimo affects the

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<sup>3</sup> In Swahili, a mountain or hill is called *mlima* (pl. *milima*); in PB (Proto-Bantu) it is *dìmà*. In Barlow's Kikuyu dictionary, mountain is *kîrîma* but *kîrimû* is a stupid, dumb person (Barlow 1951).

<sup>4</sup> Interview: SG, AK & AJ 16 May 2012

relationship between male and female will be seen in detail later on. The story already makes it clear that the men were intentionally deceiving the women and children by hiding the true facts of Kirimo. There is no mention of their motives nor of the purpose of the deception. The deception itself, expressed so clearly in this narrative, has over time and with habitual practice become internalized and pressed into the un- or subconscious region. That is, Temi men who are engaged with the practice of their traditional culture do not *say* that they deceive the women, although they clearly act out the deception in the *mase* ceremony. It is furthermore notable that Kirimo was instituted by men, rather than being a revelation of a divinity which imposes its authority on the people. In this case, the names of the divinities which are used today when calling upon Kirimo were added at a later point in time. As I am demonstrating in the course of my thesis, Temi beliefs and divine names can be quite fluid and malleable, as opposed to ritual and quotidian practices which are more durable and stable.

With the finding of the horn of Kirimo, the men decide that knowledge about the horn and its function should serve as the marking of initiation. This paradigmatic social pattern is retained today; it is not circumcision (which precedes initiation), but the bringing of the boys to Kirimo (*ehira nkirimo*) and the ensuing disclosure of the force behind Kirimo which socially transforms them into men.

The subsequent events after finding the horn brought about a complete break in the men's relationship with the opposite sex. From that point onward, the men separated themselves from the women. They became the dominant gender, and the women had to obey the men's command which included the task of providing food, i.e. working the field, preparing and cooking food. The management of food is even today a central task for Temi wives. A husband is perfectly entitled to discipline his wife if he is dissatisfied with her cooking. This discipline includes physical beating or sending her back to her parents.

There is another story worth mentioning in association with the beginnings of Kirimo and its practices. It narrates how a woman accidentally discovered the secret behind Kirimo and how she eventually became incorporated into the divine pantheon. Thus what appears to be a completely male dominated cult shows signs of gender complementarity because ultimately, society cannot exist on one gender alone.

Nankone was a woman, a mother of *batana*. She loved *batana*. When they went to her, no matter what time it was, she would give them food. She was highly respected by the *batana*. One day she went to gather firewood in the forest and found the *batana* blowing the horn. So as she looked, she saw, "Hey, those are the *batana*," and the *batana* saw her, too. Finally, they grabbed her, and said they would kill her. Others said, "No, let us not kill her.

Let us show her. Let us initiate her.” So they grabbed her and told her how they live. They taught her how they live and all about the horn. There is nothing they hid. They initiated her the way they did the men, but she was captured. She had the horn explained to her. It was blown in its secret place. When the woman understood, she could no longer speak of it. They did this to her. They told her, “Now, then, this is what eats the men; the horn that is hidden.”

And she lived as a man does. When the men danced at night, she regularly joined in the Eribaga (beating the long sticks for *mase*). She did not go openly to the *ghuseri* (gathering of men). She went at night. She entered and took the skin there. The beating sticks, she beat them. Indeed, it was her. It was she who started the Kirembe (*mase*) song, and indeed she started the cheering at the Mutene (place under the tree where the *mase* sticks are beaten). She led the cheering.

Nankone, this name ‘Nankone’ is a woman from Eroghata. She was taken hold of, then she was initiated and she hid this *gitemi* (practice). She could not speak of it again. Indeed, Nankone was initiated.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of killing the woman who discovered the secret, the young men resolve the dilemma by incorporating her into the group of initiates.<sup>6</sup> Being allowed into the circle of initiated men who know the secret behind Kirimo, Nankone is eventually elevated into the status of a heroine goddess. Today it is believed that she represents the high-pitched sounds of the horn when it is blown during the *mase* ceremony, the other ‘voices’ being Egantwalu and Karawadeda. Literally, Nankone means ‘a woman with firewood’. Rather than pointing to a literal or actual person in the past, Nankone thus refers symbolically to the female element in Kirimo. Nankone, the woman who is an insider of the male affair and knows of the men’s disguise, is also representing, in a reverse direction, the mature Temi woman who is aware of the men’s secret, but is not allowed to speak about it. In a sense, the women are accomplices of the men in the cultural game through which they construct their identity.<sup>7</sup>

Within these few stories about the origin of Kirimo we already find in a nutshell the foundational patterns that underlie gender relations, political power, and ritual practices in Temi society.

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<sup>5</sup> Rec: AG Dec. 2007. Schäfer presents the same story (1999c, 183) except that it is Ghambageu who is seen by Nankone as he is busy with the horns, and it is Ghambageu who wants to kill her. Nankone is saved by the *batana*’s intervention. According to this constellation, Ghambageu is a mere man like the others and Kirimo supersedes him in authority.

<sup>6</sup> NB 25 June 2004. There is an unconfirmed story that Diniase’s mother was killed because she happened to come across men who handled the horn of Kirimo in her own house. She simply disappeared and the word was spread that she went to Gerereera, the dwelling place of Kirimo. The assumption is that Kirimo has ‘taken’ her. Nobody dared to make inquiries about her whereabouts.

<sup>7</sup> Such gender-based secrets are found in similar fashion among the Chagga of Tanzania (Moore 1976) or Papua New Guinean groups (Tuzin 1997; Herdt 1994).

### 7.3 Celebrating *mase*

As with the *mbarimbari* ceremony, *mase* is preceded by a procession of delegates who bring a sacrifice to the main Ghambageu temple in Raghari. The sacrifice consists of goats and honey beer, but unlike at *mbarimbari* the goats are not slaughtered. Thus there is no reading of the intestines to determine an auspicious time for the ceremony to be held.<sup>8</sup> The goats are simply handed over to the temple priests at Raghari. Upon the delegations' return to Ebwe, the village is ready for the arrival of Kirimo on the morning of the next day.

In the early hours of the morning, the Kirimo horn sounds from the nearby hilltops and the men in the village hasten towards the Kiritone where they all gather in anticipation of Kirimo's entry. The *batana* of the first two age-sets are entrusted with the important task of protecting the horns during their transfer from its hiding place to the dancing plaza and back again. In this, the *nsombi* age-sets carry a greater responsibility than the rest of the adult men. Kirimo is received by the group of men who are gathered at the sacred grove (*ghuseri*) and greet *Monto Mukolo* with the words: *Obeeja etugesya baaba! Kela limwe otuij'etongo lyayyo!* 'You have come to greet us, father! Descend at once to your *etongo*!' While the men chant these words, the sound of the horn which had been echoed from the hills, all of a sudden issues forth from the enclosed area (*kibumbuku*) on the dancing plaza (where the other horn blowers are hiding and blowing the horn). This is the moment when Kirimo has truly entered the community and the dancing which will last for the next five or six days begins.

The sound of the horn impacts the men and women differently. The men are struck with a mixture of fear and anticipation when they hear the sound of the horn. But everybody agrees that this sound is unlike anything else they have heard. AK emphasizes that, 'there is no other sound that compares to it, no animal that makes a sound like that. Everyone's thoughts tell them that this is god.'<sup>9</sup>

While for the women and children the sound is associated with Mugwe, the initiated men are deeply touched by the sound. The sound of the horn of Kirimo does not just affect their mind, but their emotional being as well, as AK explains:

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<sup>8</sup> Schäfer traces this lack of a sacrifice to open *mase* to the fact that it is a peaceful ceremony during which the warriors are not allowed to carry weapons and any hostile conflict is looked upon with disdain (1999c, 172).

<sup>9</sup> Interview: AK 14 May 2012

It touches you in two areas. It touches your emotions, in your mind, and in your heart. There are three areas; *nkɔlɔ*, *bughara*, and *edemerya* (heart, intellect, thought-life). Even your body. This is not a game, you can die from it. It can even make a man cry. For the women and children its very sound makes them believe. But the physical fear resides in the men, that bodily fear.<sup>10</sup>

The interchange of the sound blasts between the hills and the dancing plaza require careful preparation and only the most skilful *batana* are chosen for this task. Moreover, there is an intimate rapport between those who blow the horns and the male audience who are listening intently. They can sense if the blowing is done properly or not. If the horn blowers ‘mess up’ by sounding the wrong tunes, they are endangering their own lives. But even the dancers on the plaza are carefully following the lead of the horn, because their mistakes (i.e. performing the wrong dances, making wrong movements) can also harm the horn blowers.

KD: So for the men it is fear...

SG: You fear because if you do any wrong, those who blow the horn can die.

AJ: Even if you are not doing a good job blowing the horn.

KD: So if they do not blow it well?

AJ: They can be beaten up. They are fooled by ...

SG: So they have to be careful when they blow the horn.

AK: They feel this fear.

SG: At that time (during a procession) when he holds the horn, even if you insult him, he does not hear it. Even if you hit him, he does not feel it. It is normal. They guard themselves carefully so they do not do anything wrong because they will be beaten up.

KD: What kind of wrong-doing are we talking about?

AJ: A failure to blow it well.

KD: But who is to determine whether it was poorly done?

AJ: The listeners.

AK: Let us say the three of us have taken the horn. One is to blow it. Instead of blowing it well, it sounds “*ghawghawghaw*”.

KD: But you still need to know what the correct style is. So what is it that makes a good sound?

SG: It is the flow. We were telling you, that the sound has its own sweetness. But if it is blown carelessly, a listener feels bad. We told you the other day, if someone has been taught, but has not learned it well, there is no way he will be given the task.

AK was convinced that in the past the horn blowers were more skilful and powerful. He remembers one particular man who was employed as a *kijɔɔri* (horn blower) when he was a youth himself:

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

There was a man, a relative of Sediyya's younger brother, named Sidase. He blew the horn. When he held (blew) it, everything trembled, the trees trembled. That fear he inspired, when he went, "*duuduuduudu*", everything trembled. He had strength. They said of him, *ntianyi jineni ya mahaaji* (strength of many male alpha animals). That was his strength. He was from Ebwe.<sup>11</sup>

During the next few days, the daily repeated processions in which Kirimo is brought to the Kiritone from the secluded area (*mutala jwa kijoomi*) and various dances are performed by men and women. A percussion instrument (a simple wooden construction with the *maghandala*<sup>12</sup> sticks laid across) is beating the dance rhythm. The most common songs at *mase* are the *kirembe* songs. For these dances, the men of the youngest age-set form the innermost circle, and the older ones the outer one. Elders may move in and out of these circles freely. The women and children are on the outside along the edge of the plaza. Each day of the festival consists of different sequences or sessions which are orchestrated by the lead singer (one of the elders) who stands next to the *kiribelo* instrument. All participants pay keen attention to the conductor so that they know what the next movement or session will be and that they do not make a wrong step. In the early afternoon, there is an intermission of a few hours so that the performers get a chance to recuperate and get some food.

One special session within the daily programme is the time when the women bring their intercessions to Kirimo. During this period, the *nsombi* age-sets form a tight circle around the wooden enclosure behind which some of the horn blowers are hiding in preparation for the 'conversation' which is to follow. The *batana* thus carry out their task as *bwekerya* (guardians) of the secret. The women who are bringing their petitions stand at a distance from the *kibumbuku* enclosure and the circle of men while the elders stand in between them. The elder who is appointed to be the mediator or translator (*mutalongi*, the announcer) now starts to engage in a conversation with Kirimo by calling out different divine names.

*Kunyola masikelo* - open my ears (so that I can hear). The *mutalongi* is saying, "I am still a small child, help me to understand what you are saying." So the *mutalongi* is pretending to be a child who does not understand the divine language.

During the prayer of the *mutalongi* he is using many names to call upon the Bagwe. When the ceremony starts out, the *batana* in hiding may not be ready, or not be there at all, so the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> These are the long poles that the novices are given at the end of their initiation.

*mutalongi* is starting to establish rapport with Kirimo. So the translator starts to call out, calling many names, as to give the *batana* time to get ready inside.

Mutalongi: We have our *ghorcu*, it has come. *Baba Kasaaya nakoora Deda*. (Father Kasaaya, you indeed are Deda)

Kirimo is quiet. *Baba Kasaaya na mahuru anana. Haaba ensiisela ya*. (Father Kasaaya, you have the eight signs. Stop being silent)

Again: *Baba Kasaaya tukaroojania migamba*. (Father Kasaaya, we have come to the conversation)

Finally the horn is blowing - he is talking. So the names used are to praise Kirimo and to rouse him.<sup>13</sup>

Many other names of divine characters are used to call upon Kirimo, such as ‘Baaba Wanjala’, ‘Baaba Mubyaari’, ‘Kaboyosi’, ‘Egansiliga’, ‘Baaba Wambyala’, or ‘Ekamahurwanana’. Some of these names are simply praise attributes, e.g. Father, you who gave birth to us (Baaba Mubyaari).<sup>14</sup> It is noticeable that the name of Ghambageu – with which *mase* used to be associated in the past (Gray 1963; B. Gray 1971; Bowen and McLaren 2011; Vähäkangas 2008a) – is completely absent. The reason for this shift in the use of divine names in the Temi cult is not entirely clear, but there certainly is an extraordinary flexibility in their theology.

The seemingly spontaneous interactions between the *mutalongi*, who is the translator, and the divine voice are not altogether extemporaneous. The *mutalongi* has already met with the family beforehand and discussed the issues they want to present to Kirimo. These may be inflictions like physical sickness, infertility, or relational conflicts. On the day of the petition, the woman who made the request will pay close attention to what is going on. The woman will make her request after the *mutalongi* has made contact with Kirimo by rousing him. The sound rings out, and the *mutalongi* translates the message. The *mutalongi* may even slip into the fenced area where the *batana* are hiding and converse with them. When he reappears he will continue the conversation. If a sacrifice is requested from the petitioning party (a goat or a sheep), the animal is led into the enclosure. The *batana* inside the enclosure produce a great noise by stamping their feet and blowing the horn pretending that Kirimo is devouring the animal.

Because of the public character of these exchanges between Kirimo and the community, at times private matters may become public knowledge. While it is the

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<sup>13</sup> Interview: SG & AK 9 May 2012

<sup>14</sup> Cf. list of other Temi divinities in Appendix 11.5

women who bring their petitions before Kirimo, the men are also listening to the exchange. Thus there can be a message directed to unsuspecting men:

Kirimo can also *ebeeka muuma* (to issue a curse), and the *mutalongi* answers, “Amen, amen”. So whoever is involved in the matter, whoever may have caused the problem and is now hearing the curse issued, he will be afraid and possibly try to return a stolen item, or rectify the situation. That is how they use this ritual to resolve a problem, too.<sup>15</sup>

The picture we get from these interactions is one of an asymmetric share of power between men and women. The women are the minor protagonists, the suffering and needy party, while the men clarify, translate, judge, and offer a solution. The above scenario suggests that the women only have access to Kirimo via the (male) mediator and need to wait their turn to communicate their needs. This is true if they act as individual petitioners, but if they decide to act as a collective, they can appeal directly to Kirimo. The women have their own songs with which they appeal to Kirimo and the horn responds.

The women go to the Kiritone to dance. They sing, “*Katoo, katoo*” and then they are sung to. They sing, “We have borne the villagers.” They are sung to (by the horn) and they sing back. Then they go to talk. They have their own songs which they know well. When they hear (the horn), “*duududuudu*” then they sing, “*hiyyayi mai jange ja mwana weto* (more water of our child).” That is how they start out. When they hear that Kirimo’s voice is soft, then they know that the goddess is here. They say it is Nankone. They say it is Gooko.<sup>16</sup>

The women thus interact too with Kirimo when recognizing the female voices in the sound of the horn. There is a mutual recognition between the horn’s voice and the women’s songs which is expressed in their interchange. For a brief period of singing to Kirimo, the gender dynamic shifts from the men’s domination to a recognition of the women’s part in society, and to their contribution in the reproductive process of the community. They highlight the fact that they are truly the *babyaari* (birth givers) of people, and indeed, that they gave birth to the elders, even to the gods. They sing: *N’esye tubyaalaga bagwe, tubyaalaga mireera ya mijye!* (It is we who bore the Bagwe, we bore the *mireera* trees of the village). The *mireera* (a type of Acacia) are large trees under which the *benamijye* meet and thus symbolize the *etongo*.

During *mase* there is a time when Kirimo withdraws into the hills, that is, the horns are blown once in the village and then all of a sudden in the hills as if Kirimo had

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Interview: AK 14 May 2012



jumped up from one location to another. The cause for Kirimo's withdrawal is then announced through the *mutalongi* that someone in the community has committed a serious transgression which requires a fine (*njoko*). The men move to the sacred grove (*ghuseri*) to deliberate what is to be done. In the meantime, the women gather on the plaza and sing to Kirimo in order to coax him to return to them. They again sing: "Even we gave birth to you, we implore you to return." The *mutalongi*, returning to the Kiritone calls out: *Mbaguteela misuuru ya bagharisya baba!* (I present to you – *Monto Mukolo* – the leather skirts of these women). By saying this he supports the women in their appeal to Kirimo to return to the community. The leather skirt of a well-respected old woman (sg. *musuuru*, pl. *misuuru*) is the symbol of female reproductive powers and is used by women to threaten or appease the men. It is also used during the initiation phase when the mothers witness from a distance their sons' trial in the initiation tunnel; slapping their hands onto their skirts they plead with Kirimo not to torture their children too much.

This notion of the women being the life-givers of the gods originates from a myth that tells the story of Jambeere, the woman who gave birth to the god Ehooru.<sup>17</sup> The concept of *mubyaari* carries a wider range of meaning than just the physical genitor. It is applied to a surrogate parent who takes care of a family in the case of death of a father or a mother. Thus *mubyaari* can also be a male figure. Moreover, Temi ancestors or their gods can be called, using the plural form, *babyaari*, as AK explains:

Another name for Kirimo is *mubyaari*, like the parent of all people. *Mubyaari* means a parent. They call him that because in a sense he is the one who gave birth to all people, male and female. He is the beginning of all people.<sup>18</sup>

The above mentioned instances are not the only times gender relations and sexuality are touched upon during *mase*. In fact, the ceremony abounds with allusions and references to sexual (and cultural) reproductive process, even though they may not be expressed explicitly, but in metaphoric ways. One example is the Kibeneda dance with which the *nsombi* age-sets start out *mase*, but which is repeated at other times during the festival period. An elder is leading the song with the *batana* joining in. The words of the song are rather obscure and meant for the benefit of the men only:

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<sup>17</sup> Rec: Masando Sediyya 18 Oct 2010, (see also Schäfer 1999c, 272–73)

<sup>18</sup> Interview: AK 14 May 2012

That tail, that tail, that tail is what conceals.  
 And our Birimo is meant to be concealed.  
 And Sinande (the secret) is like a child that needs to be educated.  
 It is something to be coddled (protected).  
 Sinande is not your child (it belongs to all men).  
 The one that leaks is opened into that place.  
 Oh that tail, it came with power,  
 And spit on the lips of the girl, a girl of the people.<sup>19</sup>

While AG was able to translate the words of the song and to interpret its main meaning, he admitted that an exhaustive analysis is not possible. The song is meant to be obscure. Its purpose is to mystify the listeners. It points to a secret which is inexhaustible. The song alludes to the working of Kirimo (or Birimo), the secret (which is likened to a child), and sexual intercourse. It conjoins the sexual reproduction process with the one of cultural reproduction: the product of the union between male and female is the natural child, but it is also the cultural child; it is the next generation which carries on their traditions.

Another example of such a cryptic song with similar sexual allusions is performed at the *mutene*, the area near the seclusion hut and the percussion instrument. These songs are called *maghuuja ja mutene*. While the men and women are dancing to the rhythm of the *kiribelo* on the plaza, the elder who is orchestrating the dances is singing to the youngest members of the *nsombi* age-set who have gathered around the instrument. Two or three of them are hitting on the *kiribelo* with a stick.<sup>20</sup> These young men are still wearing the *ngobi* (leather skirt) as a sign of their physical and moral immaturity. They continue to be subject to teaching sessions and in need of protection from the older age-mates. One of the songs performed is the following:

Our Birimo is for disguising our black hills with which we are pumping, pumping. When our Birimo passes by, we cry out. When our Birimo appears, then people appear from different countries. The country is black and like a stringy plant, like a thorny plant. A country which is sprouting.

The Birimo comes from Gelai. Gelai, Kitumbeine. The next day it (Birimo) has moved. The next day it has moved, another day. It has gone to visit Hegare. The next day it has moved, it has gone to visit Hegare. The next day it visits Hegare and then it comes to the north.

Father, come, come. We have brewed beer for you. Shuffle-shuffle into the inner part of the house. Enter the house, enter the house. Be the leader of the *etɔngɔ*. Be the leader of the goats. Come, come, come home.

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<sup>19</sup> Rec: AG 3 May 2013

<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, the percussion instrument is made out of the *maghandala* poles, the long sticks which are given to each initiate upon completing his initiation ritual. The sticks are symbolic representations of the *batana*. The sticks on the instrument are played upon until they disintegrate. This is the perfect image of how the *batana* undergo repetitive teaching and training until they integrate into society.

We have broken the firewood, both fresh and dried. All of it will become smoke for the men who are slaughterers and those who stretch the skins. There is an aroma. Come, good eater, drink water, drink water. Be our leader. When you returned, I did not see you. Where you went, I did not see our tortoise without legs having a mouth for eating. The mouth of the woman was given where? It was given. People, they came and ate. When they came, we slept, (having eaten) the guts, the guts and the back.

Father, you with the keen ears, ears hearing to the distance, to the distance like the hills, you always hear it from afar. You hear Bajuti (mythical figure stronger than *Ghambageu*) from afar. You hear Bajuti, Bajuti ...

It is a far country, and you tread it carefully. Go slowly, go slowly grown man.<sup>21</sup>

This song again touches on the theme of procreation, natural as well as cultural. Once more the song is couched in euphemistic language which is meant to instruct the young men. SG comments on the meaning of this song:

But the real meaning of the song is meant for the *baana ba ngobi* as a teaching. It is that the work of sexual intercourse is a good thing because it produces children, and it is these children who will continue Kirimo; but it is also hard work, is it not? It is the kind of work which is like a long journey which if you go on a long journey, you will get tired. So this is a long trip, and it does not require speed, haste. You will need to go steady. So the teaching is that sexual intercourse is hard work like working in the field.<sup>22</sup>

Not all of the young men listening to the song understand its sublime meaning. There are those who do not care to make further inquiries, and there are others who are curious about its deeper meaning. In a secluded and safe area, the elders will explain the meaning of these words to the initiates.

It talks about a land far away, but not in spatial terms, but metaphorically. It (Birimo) comes from far away, again not meaning physical distance, (is it referring to the ancestral past, distance or connection in time?) A place with water, dew, wetness, a difficult place to penetrate. The meaning is: people have appeared, I and my wife, for example. So when we copulate, the vagina is called 'land', where there is moisture. It is necessary for a woman to have moisture, so when you have intercourse it is necessary to be exhausted until you sweat; so that work of sexual intercourse is the same as tilling the field, it is like cutting the field. There is a kind of grass called 'Tindiga', which grows in water, it develops a kind of hair, so it is compared to the pubic hair of the woman. Because Kirimo is a human being, and he was born by a man and a woman.<sup>23</sup>

Spatial and temporal images, as well as sexual ones are mixed and combined with each other in this song. According to these images, Birimo is the causative power behind human reproduction. However, it is also the end result; the human being which

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<sup>21</sup> Rec: AG July 3, 2007

<sup>22</sup> Interview: SG 2 May 2013

<sup>23</sup> Interview: AG & SG 26 Apr 2013

is the outcome of human sexual activity. In fact, the men identify themselves with Kirimo as the following excerpt confirms:

It does not talk about 'us all', but about how Kirimo will continue! So it is not about the group's survival, but about Kirimo's continuity, and thus also about *gitemi*. Both gender, male and female have a part in it; the male continue the cult, while the women will bear children.<sup>24</sup>

According to AG, the purpose of this teaching is to:

... make known the origin of Kirimo that it is with people, how a human being was born by male and female. The meaning is also that it speaks about continuity; even if I die, there are others after me who continue to perform the same work.<sup>25</sup>

The song thus mixes images of the conception of human beings and cultural traditions (life worlds). It talks of the challenging task of human procreation which is a continuous effort, just as the continuation of *gitemi* traditions is hard work. However, the topic of the origin of human life remains a riddle over which neither male nor female have control, or of which they possess complete knowledge. Kirimo is a life force, and at the same time an enigma. It also is the locus from which *gitemi* emanates, the tradition which is so essential to the Batemi. Men and women – although each from a different vantage point – perceive Kirimo as the origin of life, the source of individual and collective life. This belief in the practices around Kirimo marks their identity and it is thus necessary to continue to protect these traditions. Kirimo also stands for the succession of generations and thus being connected with their ancestral past:

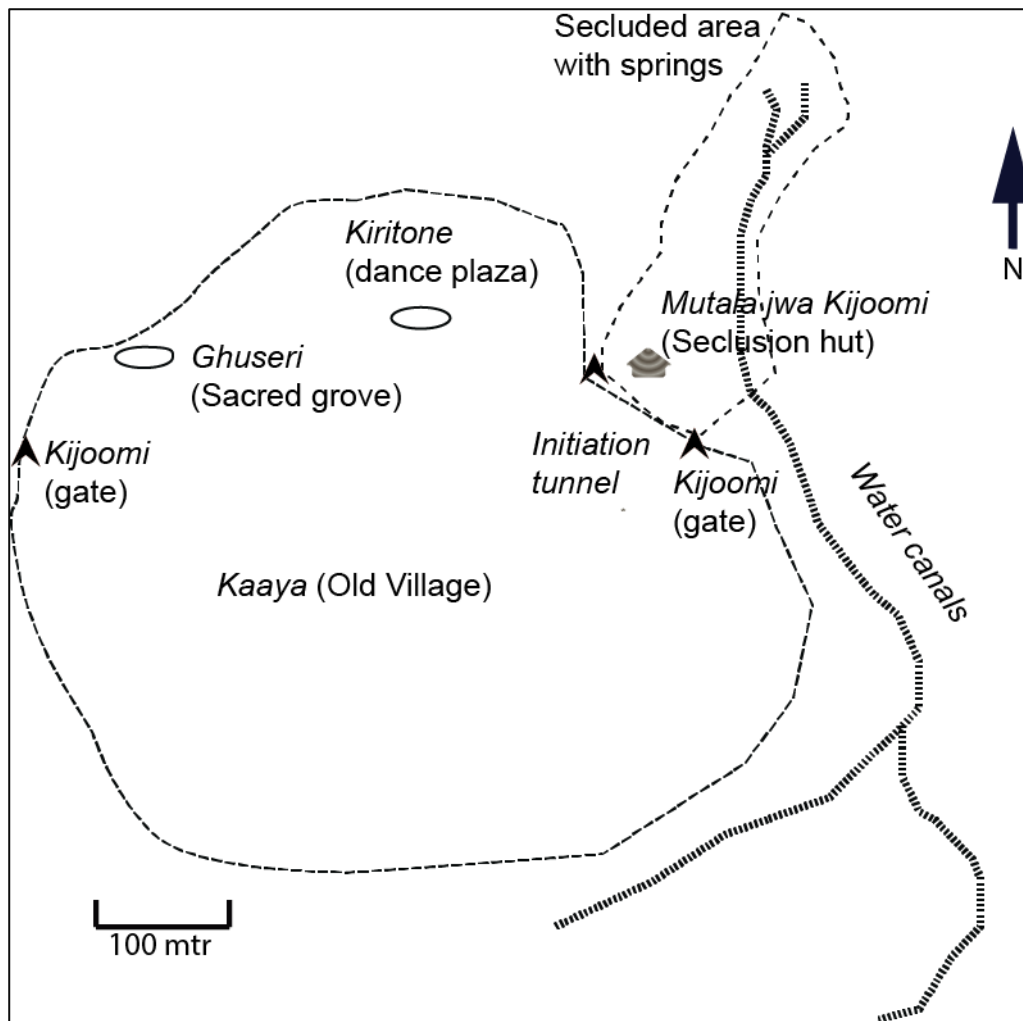
The meaning of Birimo is people. Those people are born of a man and a woman. That means, that they give and receive one another. If I as a participant die today, then another person will be born. A person who is born of a man and a woman. Once a man and a woman have slept together, then a person will be born, and that person will continue.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Interview: SG 27 Apr 2013



Map 7.1 Significant spaces during Mase in Ebwe

The dancing and singing during *mase* are under strict regulation rather than being for the sake of enjoyment or entertainment. First of all, the presence of *Monto Mukolo* in their midst causes the men to be alert and to be in tune with the guidance they get from the horn. This is the case especially when Kirimo is moving from the secluded area to the Kiritone. During its resting times the uninitiated boys and the girls are allowed to use the dancing plaza for their own informal dancing. During the months before *mase* the *batana* and the older girls are practicing their dancing steps. It is of paramount importance to be in sync with the group, and not to disrupt the dance rhythm. AK explains that: ‘You have to be confident about the dancing, otherwise you are not allowed to be there. When he says *kurrrr*, then you start, you jump, *kush*, you jump, *kush*, you jump, always together.’<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Interview: AK & SG 10 May 2014

By the time boys and girls are coming out as mature participants at the festivals, they have already absorbed the rhythms of songs and dances by watching the adults performing. Boys spend a great deal of their pastime imitating the behaviour of their older siblings. However, there are still specific dance figures, sequences, and signals to be learned. The men receive teaching either at a secluded area, or during their practice dancing at night:

We really did not know anything. But when we finished *elubuli* and we entered the *mbarimbari* and we went to the *Ebwē lya ngəgəghəwə* (rocky outcropping above Digodigo). There at the first *elubuli* we received some teaching from the older age-set (Erumagero). While we were waiting to get food, we received their teaching about the *mbarimbari* dances and songs. There is a certain step (like this ...), which we did not know. We told them: “Come and teach us.” One of us is told to hit a rhythm, and one of them is showing the pattern, the symbol. And upon a certain call: Yaaah ... and then all of you change the step, and again: Yaaah, and you change, or stop. Also, you are being taught how to jump. There is a different way of jumping for *bijəwri* and for *batana*. You are told not to jump like the *bijəwri*. If you jump, jump like a *mutana*. So he is showing you how to jump, and he corrects you if you do not do it right. Or they braid their hair, there is a way to sway the hair in a certain way. So you have a chance to exercise. This is all done while you wait for the food. But even that about Kirimo you will learn there in the seclusion.<sup>28</sup>

The young *batana* who are dancing their *mase* for the first time feel a great deal of nervousness because they are performing in front of the village audience, women and children watching them. They fear that a mistake on their side can bring ridicule and shame on them. While during their practice run, a young dancer can be corrected by the more experienced ones, during the official dance, there is real danger awaiting them:

Yes, even here at *mase* during the Samalonjo song, one of them made a mistake and dropped (sinned). So they are afraid of making mistakes and then dropping down (*etənya*). So there is this one, the Kibeneda, and even at the *mbarimbari* there is the Kirembe, a dance during which you cannot just join in; you need to wait for the right opportunity. If you enter at the wrong time, you can die. For example, there is the turn of the Erigibali age-set and the Orumachap, is it not? So the Orumachap will not agree that we (Erigibali) enter in when it is their turn (to dance). So this you will have to learn: if it is the turn of the Erumagero, it only their dance. So if it is our turn, maybe our fathers can join in, but nobody else. So these things, and especially *mase* because it is dangerous, you can die at *mase*, so you are taught: do not do anything of which you are not entirely sure. So you are told: if you are not sure of it, better let it be. So they really have many seminars about how to behave, how to live, how to honour each other, because you are told, as a man, you need to respect the mothers, it is necessary to honour the children, your age-mates.<sup>29</sup>

To be struck down – possibly fatally – because of a wrong move exemplifies the severe and unforgiving power that emanates from Kirimo. The word used for this

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

transgression is *etɔnya* (to fall, fall down), the same which indicates other transgressions against Kirimo, such as disclosing his secret. According to the above comment, a dancer is punished by the law of Kirimo for making a mistake during the dance, because falling out of sync with the others is a sign of dishonour toward the fellow dancers. AJ witnessed such an incident in Raghari:

We went to dance in Raghari. We sang and sang the whole day for Kirimo. We slept, then we jumped and jumped the Kibeneda dance. The Kibeneda was jumped a lot. Once there was a *mutana* who entered the Kibeneda (formation). He jumped but failed (to be in harmony with the others). When the others jumped up, he jumped down. When they descended, he was jumping up. I heard a sound, “HmMMM”. So we said, we are bringing Kirimo to the village gateway. We went on the pathway and I heard that relative (the arrhythmic man) fell down. And really now, why is he dead? As I saw him falling, I saw that he was grabbed. I saw that he was dragged ahead to the gateway.

But this is what I saw a little later in the afternoon, when we had returned. I saw that he had recovered and was dancing near me. I saw that the others had run, that they had slaughtered a lamb in order to heal him, so that he would not die. That is what I saw.<sup>30</sup>

During the intermission periods, the women and uninitiated youths are allowed to populate the dancing plaza. They move around freely and form smaller dance groups. While dancing, they keep a watchful eye on their surroundings because when the *batana* return to the plaza, they will forcefully chase away the dancers and onlookers. There are other times during the dance sessions when the group breaks up suddenly and the *batana* furiously chase behind women and children who scatter throughout the village. The pursued are trying to reach a safe refuge in the houses. In this rather violent encounter, the *bijɔɔri* can be severely beaten by the pursuing *batana*. The women, except for the very old ones, are also running away. If the warriors catch up with them and they are cornered, the *batana* pick up fist-size rocks and threaten to stone the person with it. They stop short just before hitting the person, turn around, and stride away. This scene is not a playful game, since the *batana* express sincere determination in their actions. It is rather a warning to the uninitiated to keep away from Kirimo, and to deter people from trying to penetrate the men’s secret.<sup>31</sup>

During the Kirembe procession the men carry the hidden horn from the seclusion (*mutala jwa kijoomi*) to the dancing plaza in a slow movement. The procession consists of 100 or more young men whose task it is to protect the sacred object. The great fear

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<sup>30</sup> Rec: AJ 6 Jul 2007

<sup>31</sup> Apparently, years ago a group of Asian tourists tried to take photographs of the *mase* ceremony and were beaten up by the *batana*. See also (Schäfer 1999c, 171).

among the men is that by some accident, the horn could be dropped, be seen, or break. Those involved with the immediate protection of the horn are under great pressure to guard the horn at all times when it is out in the open. In the procession of these few hundred metres from one hiding place to another, the men march in four or five tight rows with those carrying the horns in the centre. In order to protect the horn from being seen, they stretch their leather capes across the procession and on the side. The women and children watch the procession from some distance.

During the procession, the ones inside the crowd carrying the horns can make a wrong movement so that the women see it. So the men are really afraid, they say: “Oi, Mugwe help us to reach the Kiritone safely, that we do not encounter any problem.” That is why we said, this needs heavy protection, serious guarding. The day he (Kirimo) enters, it is necessary to have a good plan in place to guard it. There is a schedule. There are slots for the *batana* at night and at day. But all the *batana* are involved when bringing it from *biisonane* to the Kiritone, they have to guard it heavily, so that it is not being seen. That is the danger.<sup>32</sup>

AK recalls an incident when he was assigned to carry the horns in the procession:

I remember how I carried it one day, and how accidentally the dried grass that was stuffed in to prevent the horns from touching each other fell out. I was only assigned to carry it. So only the grass became visible and people began to cry and shed tears. If there is the slightest irregularity the men will start to tremble and cry.<sup>33</sup>

During one year’s Kirembe procession, I observed a deeply symbolic incident. It occurred just before the group of men reached their destination at the dancing plaza. An older man separated from the close-knit group and walked toward a woman who held in her arms a naked boy of four or five years of age. The boy was screaming and struggling as he was handed over to the old man. The man wrapped the boy in his leather cape and carried him to the congregation of men, and disappeared in the crowd. After ten minutes the boy appeared again, running toward his mother as fast as he could. Somebody commented the scene by saying: ‘Now this boy has learned not to fear Kirimo, so that when his time comes to enter the *kibumbuku* (seclusion), he will not be afraid.’<sup>34</sup>

There are different dances and dance arrangements at various times. Dances during day time (*maghuuja ja musenya*) are different from the evening dances

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<sup>32</sup> Interview: AK, AJ & SG 9 May 2012

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> NB 25 May 2005



(*maghuuja ja muragusu*). During the day there is a time when mature girls and women are joining the men in their dances. The men arrange themselves in lines according to their age-set, while the women enter the formation and dance between two men. Men and women are not facing each other, but everybody is facing one direction. However, when dancing, the dancers are to avoid physical contact with a kin relation.

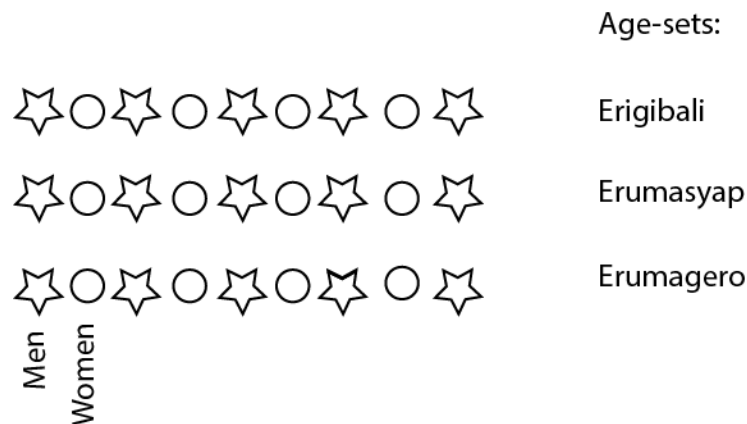


Figure 7.1 Dance formation during *Maghuuja ja musenya*

During the evening sessions, the arrangement of the men's dances reflects the hierarchy of generations. The elders (*bamalakolo*) are in the centre with the successive younger age-sets forming a circle around them and the youngest age-set on the outside.

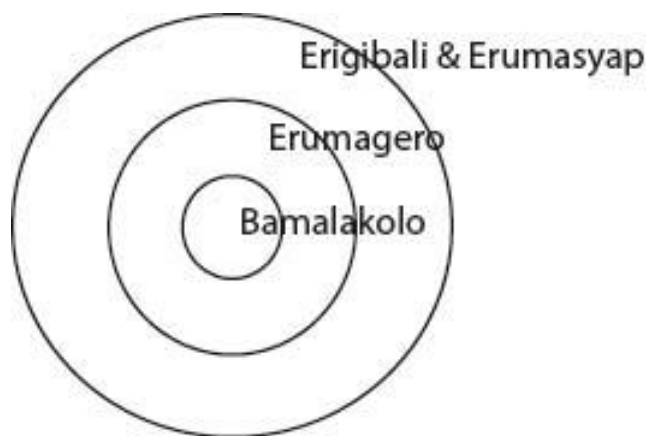


Figure 7.2 Dance formation of the *Maghuuja ja Murgusu* according to age classes

The dances during the month before Kirimo enters the village are called *maghuuja ja hoomo*. These rehearsal performances take place daily after sunset for around two hours. Men and women who want to exercise their dancing in preparation of *mase* are

free to join in. When preparing for these dances, each performance is given a nickname. *Nsonjo ja maalo* is the name for the daytime dance; it means a Sonjo bean which is not yet dried, i.e. not ready to be consumed. This expression points to the fact that the dance is still being perfected, and that the time of its consummation has not come yet. Once it is ready, and *mase* is at hand, they call it *nsonjo jy'oomagu* (ripe beans). When *mase* is at hand and the men are poised to dance, they continue their figurative speech by saying: *Let us peel (onola) the bean*, which is the signal to start singing their secret songs. This is again men's talk when they want to avoid being heard by women or children.<sup>35</sup>

We started out this chapter by mentioning that some observers (Temi voices as well as outsiders) had the impression that *mase* is a ceremony during which complete sexual licence is practised, and how this lack of restraint seemed to contradict the otherwise ordered and peaceful behaviour during this season. There is indeed a time during which sexual activity is allowed, maybe even encouraged. According to AG, the elder who functions as the translator between Kirimo and the community is announcing at the very beginning of the ceremony that:

The translator of Kirimo stands up and announces Kirimo, he says: *Nwasyaala kaaya baaba eeh; lolo ngo wo obakibora nkibatingolwa kiseelo? Eeeh. Basi omwe nabeeju jiryadu halubyaala* (You, father, have entered the home. So now, have you removed the skin cape from us? Yes! Now each one can get ready to make a new generation). So then the men who want to can go to a woman and she cannot make excuses. She makes herself ready. These 10, 8 or 7 days there is freedom to engage in sexual relations.<sup>36</sup>

This decree is called *esegeera mai* (to command the water, allow the free flow of water) and it is believed to come directly from Kirimo. SG confirms this by commenting:

It means that when *Monto Mukolo* has entered the community, it is *njaghamba* (alpha male leader) who is the male, now he has given license to be completely free, he has removed the leather cape that he had on. Now *Monto Mukolo* has removed (from him) the cape and thus he is given license to act freely, so he is allowed to have intercourse. There is nothing that sanctions him. Therefore, he has given freedom to engage in sexual intercourse.<sup>37</sup>

This license does not give complete freedom to the men, as the unmarried girls and wives are free to refuse to be sexually harassed.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview: SG 2 May 2013

<sup>36</sup> Interview: SG & AG 2 May 2012

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

All of them are involved. But if someone does not like this sexual excess or adultery they can say so (*kupiga breki*, to hit the brake), there are people who do not like to be trifled with. The girl will say: I do not want to. So she can refuse. Or she can run away.<sup>38</sup>

Normally, this sexual encounter is arranged beforehand and the parties know with whom they engage. But at other times the people engaging in these nocturnal activities may not exactly know who the partners are and they may accidentally have intercourse with an affine. However, such behaviour would be highly despicable because it turns a man unclean. In order to cleanse the men who may have unwittingly rendered themselves unclean by sleeping with a relation, a special cleansing ritual is performed (*ng'ondi y'emaala wa baka*).

What is the reason that during an otherwise solemn and highly regulated ceremony, there would deviate deliberately from normally applicable rules or practices? SG responded to this question by saying the following:

The way I understand it there is a law within the *gitemi* traditions, there is no area where it does not apply, it reaches all areas of life and is working at all times, even during *mase*. But the idea of *Monto Mukolo* freeing the water (*esegeera mai*) is that the men - you know since the beginning the men like to tell the women: this is what God told me so you better not refuse. It is a place to return, a place to enjoy oneself. The command comes from *Monto Mukolo* and is extended to the men, so they use it to satisfy their sexual desires. So when the women hear that the men are given this freedom to satisfy themselves from the Old Man, they cannot refuse. But this does not dispense of the normal law, it is still there. So there is no special decree for the days of *mase*. It is a way the men deceive women so that they would not refuse them. It is a special holiday on which we drink (beer), eat, and engage in sexual relationships.<sup>39</sup>

During the last day of *mase* the *benamijye* declare that the strict water regulations are lifted and irrigation water is from now on flowing freely. This change in the water management signals the end of the *mase* ceremony in the village. It is also the sign which allows Kirimo to move to the next village.

On the last day of the festival, the *batana* sing their praise songs to Kirimo and carry the *Monto Mukolo* to the sacred grove where the elders say their farewells to Kirimo. The horn then blasts alternatively from within the crowd of men and from the nearby hills and eventually stops. After Ebwe, Kirimo moves to the neighbouring village of Mugholo where he will enter the community after they have completed their preparations.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

## 7.4 Secrecy – dialectic between the public and the concealed

In the story of the origin of Kirimo there is an obscure reference to what is ‘feeding’ the men, namely the horn of Kirimo. There is an equally cryptic sentence in the Nankone story when the young men explain the meaning of the horn to the woman. They say: ‘This is what is eating the men – the horn that is hidden.’ The image of consummation carries a double meaning here. It refers to the idea that the initiates are ‘eaten’ by Kirimo when they are presented to him during the initiation ritual, but it also means that the men are ‘consumed’ by Kirimo ever after their initiation in the sense that their minds are constantly preoccupied with the thought of keeping his laws and defending his secret. Nankone thus discovered the secret that was hidden from the women and she was told how the hidden horn affects the men, that it is ‘eating’ them.

The secrecy to which the boys swear has a far-reaching effect on Temi society. From the practice of secrecy emanate particular behavioural and linguistic manners, distinct attitudes between men and women, and distinct access of spaces and use of objects in their environment. The postulation that secrecy permeates and even constitutes society (Simmel 1964, 330–44; Beidelman 1997a, 13–15) is certainly true for the Batemi who consider reserve in their conduct with others – especially with strangers – as a sign of maturity.

Starting from long ago, the Batemi are not people who like to spread out their matters in front of people that they do not know. A person would not be able to tell an outsider, “I saw this or that.” No! So if you know something, you keep your secret to yourself. You keep it hidden in your own heart that you saw this or that.<sup>40</sup>

Especially knowledge or information accessed as a member of a social group such as female or male age-sets, the council of elders, the clan or the family is considered a secret which should not be told to those who do not belong to the same group. Sometimes, the reason for concealment of such knowledge has to do with fear of being shamed, as in the example of the age-set which was preparing their legacy to the community, but did not want anybody to know about it:

Each age-group has its own secrets. For example the Erigibali group, they have plans to retire, to move into the senior age-group; in their planning they do not allow outsiders to meddle with their plans, not even to ask questions; what are you doing? For example once

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<sup>40</sup> Interview: SG 11 Apr 2013

we came to you about the issue of the water project (bringing water to Reera). This was one plan. But it is not good to explain these plans to others because they spread it. They may say this and that and it is possible that we reach a point where we fail, that we promised something which we cannot finish; this would bring shame onto the age-group, to say something and not to carry it out.<sup>41</sup>

Compared to these common secrets which occur in everyday social life, the secret associated with Temi initiation is of a different kind. This is a strategic secret that affects the deepest level of the people's everyday habitus. The repercussions of the production and practice of secrecy can be traced throughout Temi culture because the secret of Kirimo lies at the heart of *gitemi* law which structures the social behaviour of men and women.<sup>42</sup>

So *alai mahe* (the moment when the horn is unconcealed) is a gift from god, all the men receive it; receiving the secret is also associated with the reception of the *gitemi* law. The horns represent the customary law of the Batemi, It epitomizes *gitemi* like nothing else. If you have seen the horn, you have seen *gitemi* because *gitemi* is hidden within it.<sup>43</sup>

The impression that *mase* and the secret of Kirimo is separating men and women is shared by the following statement made by a woman:

At *mase*, the elders and young men are in their place, a place where I cannot go. They do their secret work. They do not want me, or any woman, to know what they are doing. A man is a man, and it is men only. So this separates. It causes us women to feel that we are alone. We do not have the same possibilities as men.<sup>44</sup>

The secret of Kirimo is an 'open' secret because it is revealed to the men, but also known by many women. This is not considered a paradox in Temi eyes because what matters is the proper practice of the secret and the attitude toward it.<sup>45</sup> The secret has to do with male honour and respect, the way the men imagine their masculinity and bravery. This state of bravery is achieved through initiation and *that* is why the women respect the men.

We cannot say that Kirimo is uniting women and men. I myself would say that it divides women and men. Because the women do not understand the secret, and it is not proper for

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> It is peculiar that the phenomenon of secrecy in Temi society has not been discussed by any of the ethnographic researchers, except for Schäfer who occasionally refers to it.

<sup>43</sup> Interview: SG 26 Apr 2013

<sup>44</sup> Interview: MT 16 Dec 2014

<sup>45</sup> The Chagga of Tanzania used to practise a similar type of secrecy (Moore 1976; Moore 1977).

the men that a woman discovers the secret. Because if the women uncover the secret, the man is losing the women's respect.<sup>46</sup>

The women do not hide the fact that they know that *mase* is the men's affair. They may not exactly know what is going on behind the scenes in the seclusion of the forest, but they understand that it is the men's action which produces the sound of the horn. This recent slack in the rigidity with which the secret is kept from the women is often attributed to the work of the church in Butemine. Women who have converted to Christianity no longer feel the obligation to be loyal to their traditions. They try to convince other women not to believe in the men's trickery. Today it is no longer a matter of 'knowing' the secret, but about keeping up the game of a tradition through which men and women receive mutual respect. Both men and women are – in different ways – engaged in this drama of cultural construction of their identity. As MR expresses herself, the women keep their knowledge about the secret as their own private knowledge:

Yes, it is our secret. These days even the men are aware that we know their secret. We continue this game because it is the way to give honour to the *batana*. It is all about respect and honour. We know that this is a male child and it is proper to respect him, I am his mother, we cannot interfere with this (affair) ... Once they (the boys) leave their own childhood and form themselves into an age-group it is all different. They deserve respect. For example, my son comes home and takes his weapons and spends the night there. I have not seen him since, he is busy there in the wilderness. So if he comes, I will respect him. Because he is my guardian. He guards the family and everyone, the cows, the fields, he is a soldier. This is the meaning of mutual respect.<sup>47</sup>

The women know that their own husbands and sons are blowing the horn of Kirimo. While in private conversation among themselves the women may joke about the men's secret and their grim attitude to life; but in the presence of men the women would not dare to even hint at these matters.

KD: But you as women, when you are among yourselves, are you able to laugh about these things?

MT: Very much so! So much! It is open these days, you just cannot say so in front of the men.

MR: You will be beaten ...

MT: Forget about mere beatings! If you are jabbering away, and they happen to hear you, they will bring you to the *etngɔ*. They are the ones with authority. If they decide to curse you, then you will die before it is 1 pm.

KD: So it is possible for a woman to be brought in front of the *etngɔ*?

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<sup>46</sup> Interview: AG 2 May 2013

<sup>47</sup> Interview: MR 27 Jan 2012

MT & MR: Yes, if you are jabbering away (about the secret), then you can!<sup>48</sup>

Because of its strict requirement of concealment, the secret of Kirimo also regulates communication within the kin relations. A father is not at liberty to explain to his sons the meaning of the *mase* ceremony or what the sound of the horn is all about. A boy is severely rebuked by his father if he should ask questions about the sound of the horn. A father will either ignore the question completely, or he may threaten the boy.

The secret male matters cannot be discussed even among fathers and non-initiated sons. A male child may ask some questions slowly, like saying when Mugwe comes. But for instance, I asked my father once: “When will Mugwe come?” He did not answer me, but he said: “Go and ask your mother!” I was a small boy, so he was very rough and I was afraid. The mother was there but she could not say anything. From that day on I did not ask a question again. So if a child asks a question, he will be rebuked fiercely so that he would keep quiet about it.<sup>49</sup>

It is the mother who explains that the sound they hear across the valley is Mugwe, their god. Until the boy is initiated and learns the truth about Kirimo himself (and even after that), the topic of Kirimo is considered taboo in the family.

But the taboo is not only about the restriction in their relationship within the family. The initiation oath of secrecy also regulates communication among age mates, especially the first two age-sets. When they converse with each other about their own affairs, they want to make sure that their words are not overheard by an outsider. Thus, when a group of men meet and they are not sure if everyone gathered is initiated, one of them will say: *Mai njaseri?* (Is the water clear?). If an uninitiated man or a woman should be among them, the answer is: *mai njeeru* – (the water is dirty). If they are all among themselves, the answer is echoed: *Mai njaseri*.<sup>13</sup> If a *mutana*, talking to an age-mate, wants to make a reference to Kirimo he will use an ambiguous sign, a euphemism, but never explicitly mention Kirimo. They fear that by an accidental slip of the tongue, the secret may be leaked to an outsider. This aura of extreme care to protect their secret (and their own identity) indicates the powerful grip Kirimo – and by metonymic extension the initiated male community – exercises on the men.

A secret is only a secret if there is the possibility of its disclosure (Simmel 1964, 330–376). Initiated Temi men can be tempted to reveal the secret to others and the age-set, under the leadership of their *bekorani* have to consider this possibility and prepare

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<sup>48</sup> Interview: MR & MT 17 Dec 2014

<sup>49</sup> Interview: SG 3 May 2013

for it. During the *mase* of 1996, two men who functioned as horn blowers (*banyosya*) intended to make the horn visible in public. Their plot became known to the other *batana* and they beefed up their measures of protection so that it would not happen during the procession.

In 1996, there were some men who wanted to disclose the horn to others. They agreed among themselves that they wanted to show the horn to others during the procession. But other *batana* heard about the scheme. So we, all the *batana*, planned together to show up with our short sword. We were not able to call in anyone else, because we do not have anyone else to help us, so we discussed it together. There were two rows of guarding *batana* on each side and up front and in the back. The ones in front could not fight, they could only push back when the horn carriers tried to move ahead too fast. So whenever the guys under the skins carrying the horns were trying to push towards outside, or trying to get out, we hit them hard, when they went the other side, you fought them off, so that they were pushed back into the middle until we reached the place. Once we arrived at the Kiritone, we stood close together; there was no place to move inside. So you see that this is a great danger, it is disaster. All the other men were crying out.<sup>50</sup>

In another incident a young man (who was himself a *munyosya* – a horn blower – from Eroghata) wanted to impress his girlfriend by telling her about the truth behind Kirimo. But instead of explaining it to her, he asked her to climb the tree which was overlooking the secluded hiding place on the dancing plaza. Climbing that tree she would then see for herself what was really going on. According to the story, that same day the *mutana* was bitten by a poisonous snake and died immediately.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, there is another secret associated with male initiation and that is the belief that the initiated adult man does not have any bowel movement because his stomach has been replaced with a stone.

It was believed that the men, any male who has been brought to *Monto Mukolo*, has no bowel movement, because he does not have bowels. The belief is that when he was initiated everything, his stomach, is removed, his normal spirit is removed and replaced by a spirit of stone, meaning his spirit is very strong and he is not afraid of anything. He will not be afraid of any wild animals, or the Maasai, or anything.

It is not that the stones of Bagwe are put into the *batana*. It has to do with the character of the *mutana* which is being hardened, strengthened. So for a Temi man it is not easy to enter an outhouse when a woman is around. Or even if he has to relieve himself in the wilderness, he will not go while a woman is present. It is necessary that he goes far away where nobody sees him.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Interview: AK 19 Apr 2011

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Interview: SG 26 Apr 2013



As a consequence of this belief, members of the *nsombi* age-sets are taught not to eat in public. If they do so, they are fined with a goat. This taboo seems to be a residue of the belief that after initiation men do not defecate. While there are similarities with an ancient Chagga practice as described by Moore (1976), here the emphasis is on the nature of the male character, rather than on sexual reproduction.

Temi secrecy and its accompanying practices stand in an ambivalent relation to the customs which are called *gitemi* because the secret needs to be kept safe *and* communicated at the same time. When participating in initiation rituals and accessing these secrets, the young men come in contact with deep and otherwise not communicable realities of their ancestral past. But just as Simmel (1964) characterized secrets as invariant of their contents, Temi secrecy is not really about a specific content, but about the mode of communicating cultural realities. The goal of practicing their secrecy is to preserve a specific social and cosmological order. In a paradoxical way the secret is known to men and women, yet they are not to verbalize it. This mode of secrecy is instrumental in communicating important realities about Temi life. And these cultural realities are what the Batemi mean with *gitemi*, although again, to directly speak about it is impossible. The ritual ceremony of *mase* is thus the medium to keep social order, and to transform their people into human beings. The institutional reality of *gitemi* which has grown through centuries of constant repetition and embodiment, this reality of two parallel worlds which are part of the adult Temi life, is not likely to disappear soon. Even if the secret is ‘known’ to outsiders, the system will not break down because it is the actual performance, the ‘doing’ of secrecy that is most important (cf. Bellman 1984).

Here the connections between *mase* and *gitemi* become clearer. *Gitemi* is deeply embedded with the Batemi – not as an essence – but in the manner of continued performance of *mase* and the initiation rituals through which they reproduce their culture. But while it is true that the authority of their traditions is partly retrieved from the past (cf. Bloch 2005, 123–137),<sup>17</sup> *gitemi* works in more complex ways than one directional, i.e. reproducing the past in the present. When the *benamijye* organize their *ghorou*, they are acting upon the world and the community to impose upon it the order which is known to them from their ancestors with the purpose of bringing their people into harmony with the universe. But rather than just merely reproducing this cultural order from the past, these leaders are concerned by what they are confronted with in the form of children growing up and the need to transform them into proper human beings, or in the form of unforeseen events like droughts, water shortages, diseases, or war.

Some of these events are foreseeable and can be planned (initiation, marriage), others are contingencies which fall upon them unawares. But the task of all Batemi is to be prepared at all times for any task that confronts them, and the instrument they have at hand is called *gitemi*. Intimate knowledge of their tradition will provide them with the necessary means to control whatever they encounter, from individual social conflicts which need resolution to the ordering of gender relations, from overcoming threats of droughts and diseases to the defence of their territory against invading Maasai. *Gitemi* and the ancestral powers they call upon will sustain them and provide a secure pathway on which they can continue their journey. *Gitemi* as tradition is what has been efficacious in the past and is still powerful today. That is why the elders cannot imagine a world without *gitemi*, it is impossible to imagine the days ahead without their way of life and strength to encounter adversity.

## 7.5 Cultural symbols for social reproduction

The two central dimensions that make up Temi culture are sexuality/gender and age. However, as has been amply demonstrated by anthropologists, while human sexuality is naturally identifiable, gender and age need to be marked ritually (Moore, Paul, and O'Barr 1977; Moore 2007; Moore, Sanders, and Kaare 2004; Moore 1994; Heald 1999; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Sanders 2008; Beidelman 1997). The transformation processes require the fusion of male and female symbols, as well as the fusion of male and female bodies. But the powerful dynamics of these regenerating processes need to be protected and cared for, lest they get out of control.

As in other African societies, the Batemi's concern for cosmological order, social structures, and human bodies (as male and female) are interrelated and interdependent (Heald 1999; Beidelman 1997; Moore, Sanders, and Kaare 2004). Mary Douglas has pointed out how the social body influences and restricts the behaviour of the individual body (2003). The way the Batemi experience their lives as gendered beings is largely conditioned by the way they are socialized in the specific context of their immediate and extended families, and in particular through initiation processes. The Batemi imagine their society in such opposites as male and female, left and right, village moieties, *kaaya* (home) and *nsenge* (bush or wilderness), water and fields, ripe and unripe, junior and senior, *bijɔɔri* and *batana*. Some of these dichotomies are taken from an observation of nature, others derive from their own bodily experiences. For the Batemi, the process of

natural procreation and the mode of social reproduction are inextricably blended together, as they are interlinked with the idea of power and knowledge. As described in the previous chapters, the model of recreating men and women, junior and senior male generations requires the proper management of symbols and the imparting of knowledge to designated people. However, initiation is not simply the communication of knowledge, but demands the engagement of the novices (as well as women and initiated men) in particular territories and with particular objects. As a result of this physical engagement in the *biiso ndane* sanctuary, and the experience the novices undergo in the initiation tunnel and ‘eating’ the oath of Kirimo, Temi social structures are not just transferred as verbal lessons which are retained as memorable rules, but they become incorporated in their being. In other words, the lessons the boys learn during their initiation are less about concrete knowledge, but about attitudes toward those who are excluded from this experience (i.e. the women, children, and Baturi). Key symbols like the horn of Kirimo, the behaviour of the elders and *batana* in the initiation tunnel, or the meaning of *gitemi* are not explained and will remain unfathomable even after the initiation rite. These symbols retain their opaque nature as part of the enigmatic powers that constitute the life source of society, and as such they are meant to remain elusive.

One paradox of *mase* and the Kirimo cult is that it presents itself with overriding male symbols and the male positioned at the centre of the ceremony. However, on a closer look there are many female symbols (some more visible than others), which are used in ambivalent ways. Finally, there are symbols – such as the leather cape, or water/springs – which used to be female but over time mutated into male symbols.

Thus, for example, the overall movement of bringing the novices into contact with the horn of Kirimo takes place in the forest sanctuary near the water springs. The springs are called *riiso lya mai* (lit. the eye of the water) which is also the euphemistic name for the vagina. The dense forest surrounding the springs thus resembles female genitals. The underlying analogy is that growing boys into manhood takes place by symbolically fusing male and female. But these symbolic forms occur on a deeper, unconscious level, because on the conscious level, the boys are told to get rid of all that ‘smells’ of girls or women. They are purged of all association with their mothers.

There are several sexual symbols that can be applied as male or female. For example, *mai* (water) can refer to semen (*mai ja wa balome*), or to vaginal fluids (*mai ja wa baka*), both of which are essential elements in procreation of life according to Temi

beliefs.<sup>53</sup> Water and moisture are mentioned in the songs which are sung by elders to teach the novices during *mase*. Again, while everything seems to be about being male, the elders hint at female sexuality, and the need for the other sex. Water in more general terms is of course associated with the political authority of the *benamijye* who manage the distribution of irrigation water. It is a symbol of male power, a source of life, the water that floods the fields and brings forth fruit (analogous to semen inserted into the female body). The flow of water also evokes the continuity of *gitemi*, a constant movement that never stops. The elders insist that the spring waters have never, and will never, fail them. While the water is completely in the hands of the men today, the myth about the early days reveals how the springs first belonged to a woman, but how the ‘water’ was taken from her by a man (see chapter 4). Again, symbols are appropriated by men as theirs, but they are used in ambiguous ways because of the necessity to bring male and female together for regeneration.

A similar case is found with the symbol of the leather cape which, as we have seen in the description of *etuma ngobi*, is associated with the teaching of novices during initiation. The leather skin which is produced by the women represents the female care, the place of storage, safety, the womb. During the *mase* celebration masculinity is celebrated, but just as the horn of Kirimo is wrapped up in a leather skin and comes forth from its hiding place, the *batana* were once born from the female womb. We can also look at the sacred rocks that represent the Bagwe; whenever they are transported during a ritual cleaning ceremony, they are wrapped in leather. The combining of male and female symbols as in these instances suggests that there is an underlying order, a belief that there is a gender complementarity that should not be disturbed, all the while the overt order maintains the male in a dominant position.

There are other examples of how gender relations are imagined as they are hinted at through euphemistic expressions. One of these is that the men are likened to a forest, densely populated with trees so that nothing and nobody can penetrate it. This notion is expressed in idioms such as *balome na nsenge* (men are like the wilderness/forest), *balome bo masaba* (men are like the Masaba forests), or *nsenge ni njiro* (the wilderness is dark, impenetrable). It is of course the group of initiated men who represent a protective shield against intruders who want to know their secret. On the other hand, the female sex is sung about as a landscape with thick interwoven roots which the men have

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<sup>53</sup> Interview: AG & SG 27 Apr 2013

to penetrate in order to achieve their goal, sexual intercourse. As AG explains the content of the song: 'There are fluids, then there is hard work, you have to work yourself through the thick bush, you have to cut down the heavy grass (*tindiga*), so that is the teaching.'<sup>54</sup>

The elders want to teach the novices about the deeper meaning of their origin and the connection between human sexuality and social procreation. The men need to understand how precarious this process is, and that it needs to be protected from being destroyed, because their own mode of existence would be at stake. Again, AG explains:

While the truth of Kirimo being the horn blown by men may very well be known and acknowledged by women, the deeper and veiled truth that Kirimo is really man and woman and also its procreation, the child, is not known by women.<sup>55</sup>

The management of fertility and reproductive processes are thus considered highly dangerous and sensitive areas which should not be treated carelessly. The novices are told that they should protect the secret just as a woman protects her private parts from being disclosed in public. In fact sexuality among the Batemi is treated with much decorum and decency, unlike the attitude of other African cultures where public teasing and singing about sexual matters is rather common (Beidelman 1997; Beidelman 1980). SG comments on the perception of sexuality in the following comment:

Growing up as a child, I remember how the mothers and grandmothers talked about sexual intercourse; it is not acceptable to mention it in any normal discourse because it is shameful. Everybody knew that it is a thing between the father and the mother, it is between the men and the women. So they did not like the children to know anything about it because it was shameful. During daytime it is not proper to sleep with a woman because that part (genitals) is not suitable to be seen. So all these things of sexual intercourse in the past people warned against any talk about it because it is not a matter of honour. So you have to talk about it carefully or in a separate place and at night. And that is the time of doing it, at night. So it is not that they are afraid of anything ... but they do not like to talk about it because they do not want to humiliate the woman, or the private part of the woman. So even to mention it is very shameful.<sup>56</sup>

The Temi mode of individual and social reproduction is thus imagined in an interplay of various symbolic objects and behaviour, whereby the moral values emerging from the ritual performance influences their attitude toward their bodily

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<sup>54</sup> Interview: AG 27 Apr 2013

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

experience of sexuality. However, their mode of cultural regeneration and social existence comes at a high price for the men who are subject to a severely regimented law that binds them to keeping the secret at all cost. A transgression of this law results in death, a belief that holds true today. The collapse of this system would bring unthinkable chaos, because it would remove social orders of gender and generation hierarchy through which they convey and receive mutual respect and honour (*nsoni*).<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, there are signs that things are changing. The Christian church and the Tanzanian government (through education and a state constitution) offer an alternative view of seeing gender, a different mode of how male and female can relate to each other. Women have started to be more independent and establish their own livelihoods either through an employment or a small-scale business which makes them independent of male tutelage. Also, there is an increased tendency of girls who refuse marriage because they do not want to be caught up in what they consider an oppressive relationship. Meanwhile, the men are rather alarmed by such developments; they consider such independent behaviour of women as unacceptable, their insubordination as a defiance of *gitemi* values.

## 7.6 Historical changes: from Ghambageu to Kirimo

Documented data over the last 60 years suggest that there has been a marked change in the divinities associated with *mase*. Ethnographic writing between the 1950s and 1970s about Temi culture (at that time referred to as Sonjo) do not mention the name Kirimo or Birimo at all (Gray 1971; Gray 1963; Bowen and McLaren 2011; Donovan 2003). Although *mase* is briefly touched on as another of their ‘obscure’ rituals, the divine being behind the sound of the horn always identified as Ghambageu. The men’s refusal to talk about the origin of the horn’s sound was reportedly the same in the 1950s as it is today, as Betty Gray narrates so vividly:

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<sup>57</sup> A very similar men’s cult of a people group in Papua New Guinea has been described by Donald Tuzin (1980; 1997). He describes how the advent of Christianity led to the demise of the cult with unforeseen consequences for men and women who had to find new ways of expressing their gendered roles. See also (Godelier 1999).

One clear morning in early November Gidia was teaching me Sonjo words when suddenly a distant blowing, as of a trumpet or horn, rent the air. It came from the other side of the valley and after three prolonged blasts it subsided momentarily, then began again.

“What is that noise?” I asked Gidia ...

The horn sounded again. I repeated my questions to Gidia.

“What noise?” he replied at last, “I hear nothing.”

But just as he said that the trumpeting, on a higher key, began again.

“That, Gidia, don’t you hear that,” I demanded.

“Who is blowing the trumpet, and for what reason?”

But Gidia’s face, eager and attentive a minute ago, now looked stony and preoccupied.

Giving me a cold look he excused himself and went away in evident confusion (Gray 1971, 175).

Later on in a private setting, Gidia (the Grays’ informant) explained to them how ‘Khambageu descends from the mountain top of Oldonyo Lengai to visit his chosen people, the Sonjo’ (ibid. 176). A Temi woman tells how prayers were directed to Ghambageu, ‘... for Khambageu is everywhere ... He is up there in the sky; he is in this tree, in that stone, he is everywhere, listening. So all day I pray. I say, “Khambageu, give health to my family; Khambageu, send rain that we have good crops”: Anything I want, I ask him’ (ibid. 183).

Vincent Donovan also mentions only the name of Ghambageu in connection with *mase*, as he reports:

There is a group of priests in the village – twelve of them – in charge of the whole feast. Prayers are offered to Khambageu through these priests, and then they, having spent some time in the temple speaking with Khambageu, emerge to pass on his messages to the people (Bowen and McLaren 2011, 145).

Here Donovan seems to confuse the priests (*baghɔrɔwane*) with the village elders (*benamijye*), and the temple is really the wooden seclusion on the dancing plaza where the prayer intercession takes place between the women and the divine horn. In similar fashion, Vāhākangas sees Ghambageu as the driving force behind *mase* (2008, 81–87). In fact, he subsumes all Temi religious activities under the leadership of Ghambageu, as if that name was synonymous for their religious beliefs (2008; 2006; 2008a).

But according to my data, Ghambageu is no longer identified with the cult of *mase*. The absence of Ghambageu in the *mase* cult has been emphatically insisted upon by a number of Temi men. Neither does his name appear in any of the songs, myths, or incantations during *mase*. During the appellation of *Monto Mukolo* or the singing of praise songs, many divine names are used (some of them being praiseworthy attributes) – but not the name of Ghambageu. However, Ghambageu does still appear in myths about the beginning of their priestly (*ghɔrɔwane*) and government (*etɔngɔ*) traditions.

*Mase* is thus the Temi ritual mode of ordering gender and generational relations. It does so through a religious system which was once called into being by men, and has now become the self-regulating mechanism in which men and women are caught up. The horn of Kirimo is the powerful signifier that orders society into male and female; the men are subject and bound to the law of Kirimo, while the women believe that Kirimo is Mugwe, and so are subaltern to the men. In the men's mind, there is no doubt about Kirimo's impact in the constitution of the community:

Kirimo is the foundation of men, it protects the society. It builds up the family with one relationship, one decision. Kirimo shapes all the men to be unified between all the villages of Butemine. It takes you and builds you into a unity with the elders.<sup>58</sup>

Another image used to represent the intimate relationship between the men and Kirimo is called *nsenge ndirima*, which means that men are like trees:

Once we have departed from here (initiation), we enter *nsenge ndirima*. It means that the men are like trees. They make up a great forest, and Kirimo is in the centre of it. Those who steer *Kirimo* are like a vast forest. Even if you try to investigate in the forest, you will not get far.<sup>59</sup>

Considering these comments and the entire religious system of the Batemi, one is reminded of Durkheim's postulation that religion is socially determined (Durkheim 1995, 44). Kirimo is indeed the image and organizing principle which unifies Temi society into a moral community, a church. And despite the men's claim that there is nothing sacred about *mase* and Kirimo,<sup>60</sup> the way the Batemi practise secrecy, the keeping apart and hiding of the horn, all the taboos of sacred spaces are typical signs of sacral objects.

## 7.7 Conclusion

The *mase* ceremony is the annual period during which the central values of Temi culture are brought into sharp focus. The intense activities at *mase* often result in ecstatic

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<sup>58</sup> Interview: AK 14 May 2012

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Interview: AK May 2012



experiences. It is the time when the most sacred object which is kept hidden throughout the year, the horns of Kirimo, are brought out in the open – yet remain hidden to the women and children. This dilemma and the supernatural danger associated with the *mase* practices pose a challenge to the initiated men who have sworn to protect the secret of Kirimo at all cost. During the *mase* celebrations sexual and gender relations are addressed through ritual dancing and subliminal and euphemistic language. Throughout the ceremony there is a double entendre between the women and the men since both know about the men's disguise. However, both parties continue to perform the cultural game in which the men retain social dominance over the women. But it is a game in which the women are complicit protagonists, rather than the suffering victims. *Mase* is also the ritual context in which male initiation takes place, the locus of Temi cultural identity. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 8

### 8. CROSSING OVER (INITIATION)

#### 8.1 Introduction

Male initiation rites among the Batemi focus on the transformation of the uncultured, ungendered, and immature to become cultured, gendered, and mature. In other words, the purpose of initiation rites is the transformation of the person, to bring forth a new being. Temi initiation is called *ehirwa nkirimo* (to be presented to Kirimo), *ekorya* (to grow, bring up), or *esabaga* (to cross over). Male initiation is of central import to Temi society. While the Temi rite of passage is neatly condensed into such illuminating concepts as ‘crossing over’ or ‘to grow’, the reality behind these metaphors is rather complex.

Rather than describing in detail all the sequences of Temi initiation, I am highlighting those instances which are especially pertinent to the formation of the person, and are relevant to our understanding of the Temi moral world.<sup>1</sup> I am also presenting data of current events in relation to the initiation rite in order to suggest how these rituals are contingent to other events and social needs, as opposed to being empty rituals that are carried as a routine.

#### 8.2 Time and space of initiation

Initiation takes place every seven to ten years, and is set within the framework of the *mase* ceremony. The rite of passage comprises the elements one would expect, such as ritual drama, oaths and secrecy (as discussed in the previous chapter), spiritual and ancestral powers, sacred spaces, and imparting of special teaching. While there are many commonalities in initiation rites in Africa, each group being embedded in its own history and geographical environment has developed its own way of marking their

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<sup>1</sup> A description of the events at the initiation written by three Temi men is found in the appendix 11.3.1.

identity (Beidelman 1997; Vansina 1955; Heald 1998; Eliade 1965; La Fontaine, 1985; Bloch 1986; Kratz 2010). What makes Temi initiation different in comparison with others is the male driven cult around Kirimo and the self-imposed oath of secrecy which constitutes masculinity. It is a male ideology that shapes their society in a unique way as it empowers (and inhibits) the men, and orders the relationship between male and female.

### 8.3 Prelude to initiation

For the Batemi it is not circumcision which grants a boy the status of a man, but the separate initiation ritual when he is brought before Kirimo (*ehirwa nkirimo*). Circumcision is, though, the time when boys are aligned with an age-group. Even if a boy should be initiated at a later time, he belongs to the group he was circumcised with. Indeed, circumcision which precedes initiation has its own group dynamics. The months leading up to *mase* during which initiation takes place are filled with anticipation and suspense. The initiative lies with the boys (*lebaradani*) in whom the desire to cross the threshold to adulthood is kindled. They have been watching and imitating the older boys growing into *batana*, and they have been organizing their own informal age-set with their own rules and games, and now they are poised to pass through the gate of adulthood and be acknowledged as adults themselves. The leaders of the novice group, 16 to 18 years of age, approach the village elders by saying: *Tusoorate ndaghuyya!* (We are looking for the – circumcision – knife). In other words, they put forth a formal request to be circumcised, and consequently to be initiated. The elders act surprised and tease the boys by saying:

“You like to be circumcised?! You are still *bijɔɔri*, small children, what do you want to be circumcised for? Can you indeed collect honey?” The elders ridicule the boys. But the boys answer: “We can!” Elder: “You can do what?” Boys: “We have grown and can do the work!” They do this game four times.<sup>2</sup>

In the following months, the elders and the age-set leaders of the *nsombi* age-set (the previously initiated youths) are subjecting the novices (*bijɔɔri*) to several tests in which they have to prove their physical strength and maturity. Such a test can consist of

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<sup>2</sup> Interview: SG 10 May 2012

cleaning the water canals, collecting honey, or constructing a new road. The finished work will remain a memorial of their accomplishments throughout their lives, as AK and SG point out their age-set's works:

SG: We made the bricks for the secondary school (BUDEA) in 1998. This was the bigger work.

AK: And we did a large furrow from there to ...

SG: So anyways, there is a testing phase. Finally the elders will consider the request: they can indeed collect honey, they can farm, they can make a furrow etc. So they say: now sit down, and be circumcised. So once they successfully accomplished these tests, the boys can rest, they have shown that they have matured. They are ready.<sup>3</sup>

The boys are examined in their ability to achieve a specific goal, but also to demonstrate their ability to cooperate as a group, to show loyalty among each other, and to be united in their vision. This capacity to function as a coordinated group will be crucial for the career of the age-set.

The decision to circumcise and initiate another generation of boys lies not solely with the *etongɔ*. The elders also have to discuss the issue with the leaders of the acting *nsombi* age-set. The *bekorani* of those age-sets may look critically at the prospect of receiving competition in the form of a new generation of young warriors, and of being pushed up on the age-set ladder. A meeting between the age-set leaders and the *benamijye* can lead to a minor crisis, as SG (who is a *mwekorani* of his age-set) recalls:

This is how the *nsombi* refuses. You know that I am Erigibali, the first group. There is the group that follows. So if the younger group wants to cross over, then they have to let our *bekorani* know about it. We discuss whether they are ready to be brought over. The *benamijye* will come, and talk with the *bekorani* of the *nsombi*. If the *etongɔ* has decided that they will cross over, there is no one who will stand against that decision. The elders make all the plans, even knowing that we will refuse. Then they come to call the *nsombi*, and the *bekorani*, and *baribita* (the mediators between the *etongɔ* and the age-set). They say, "We have planned to cross them over, those youths. What do you all say to that?" Then our group starts to say, "What is it that makes you want to cross them over? In what ways have we failed? Have we failed to answer the war call (*masahu*)? Have we failed to clean the irrigation ditches, or what?" They will answer, "No. We wanted to add to your strength." And we will say, "No, we do not want them. Leave them until next year."

So we may have a case with them, even over three days. We refuse. But the *benamijye* know that they have already eaten people's goats. At the end they will say, "We have already eaten people's goats, and we cannot give them back any more. So, let us cross them over. And another time we will come to you earlier." That is how their thinking is. They

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

want them to cross over so they do not get into mischief. So that people do not feel too bad, so they are convincing them.<sup>4</sup>

The mention of the ‘already eaten goats’ is a reference to the fact that the *benamijye* have already made an agreement with the parents of the boys to have them circumcised. As a payment the parents handed over a goat. Once the age-set leaders realize that a deal has already been struck, there is little they can do to refuse the movement already set in motion.

Another examination the young aspirants face is a test of physical strength with the incumbent *nsombi* age-set. In a vivid illustration of the dynamics involved in this rite of passage, the boys are to organize themselves outside the village gate and try to break through the gate, while the members of the *nsombi* age-set defend it:

This is a test to see if the new age-set can overcome the older one; the older age-set is defending a village gate (*kijoomi kya bisikeene*). The boys will send the largest and strongest boys ahead, they try to push through the gate. They need only to bring through two or three of them, which means the job is done. If these few pass, there is no more quarrel.<sup>5</sup>

In the past, circumcision of boys was carried out in large groups with a number of elders acting as circumcisers. Today it is done in a semi-private manner in that a couple of neighbouring houses organize a circumciser who is paid a fee. I was able to participate in one of these events:

A group of about 15 boys are gathering to watch the circumcision of two of their friends. Most of the boys have already undergone the ritual; they are dressed up with colourful *kangas* and are wearing ostrich feathers on their heads. Karutyase, the experienced and trusted circumciser, a man from the Baturi clan, has been called in to perform the operations. Other men present (no women or girls are allowed to be there) are the father of the younger boy, Baba R, Baba S, and the uncle of the older boy. Karutyase is holding up the syringe with the anaesthetic while everyone is watching him with tense anticipation of the events they are about to witness. After a while, the younger boy is called over to sit on a flat stone. He is now stripped of his *kanga*. Everybody gathers around, stretching their heads as to see what is happening. “Sit down here.” There is suppressed laughter from some kids. The boy’s facial expression changes as he has to hold the razor blade for Karutyase, and now realizes that it is going to happen. His body stiffens, his mouth twitches, and he begins to cry. A slap in the face. Karutyase pulls the boys legs apart. “Are you acting like a girl?” Laughter. Baba R says: “Do not watch.” He wraps his arms around the boy and covers his face. The boy is sobbing, shaking while his friends keep mocking him. Karutyase skilfully removes the prepuce.

Meanwhile, the father has been busy with other preparations; a goat had been slaughtered and is now stretched out on a bunch of green branches. Besyu is slicing its

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<sup>4</sup> Interview: SG & AK 31 Jul 2011

<sup>5</sup> Interview: SG 10 May 2012

belly open. The father is stirring the goat's blood which has been collected in a pot and is cooking over a fire.

The ordeal is over; the two boys have been dismissed and are sitting a few metres away from the group, resting on stones. They are able to overlook the valley, their home land. Their faces still contain traces of the recent pain, but they also show relief because now all is over.<sup>6</sup>

From now on until the month of November or December, these boys will prepare themselves for the major transition ritual, their initiation into manhood. The younger *lebaradani* are roaming around in small groups, hunting pigeons and other birds. In similar fashion to the Maasai youths, they improve their skills and abilities by competing with each other. Each bird they kill is marked by a small incision in the bow. Not all who are circumcised will be initiated this year; some of them are as young as five or six; they will have to wait for the next initiation ceremony in eight or ten years. At this stage, the boys are not allowed to carry any weapons in public, only their *ndang'uri* (a short thin stick with a specially designed head out of dung plaster and ornamented with a cowrie shell). Also, until they are fully initiated they are not allowed to use the dancing ground for their dancing.

As mentioned before, Temi male circumcision is but a precursor of the main initiation ritual which follows. However, it forges a deep and lasting bond between the age-mates. The key symbols of an age-set that unites them are the blood that was shed in the ordeal, and the knife that made the incision. Thus age-mates are called people of one blood, or of one knife.<sup>7</sup>

You know that the age-set is to be circumcised together, having nothing to do with the Old Man. The age-set is *ndaghuyya*. So when that time comes, the Baturi are circumcised along with the others. Even when they see that the girls (of the Batemi) are being circumcised, then they do it as well. That is where the strength comes from, the knife of circumcision.<sup>8</sup>

The strong loyalty among age-mates is not just formed during the circumcision and initiation rite; it has already been there since the boys have started meeting in groups during their childhood. The boys in these groups organize themselves and

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<sup>6</sup> NB 9 Mar 2009

<sup>7</sup> Beidelman entitled a book about Kaguru initiation rites 'The Cool Knife' (1997a). The expression is Beidelman's own coinage and not an authentic Kaguru expression - it is his way of summing up the key symbol of Kaguru culture. The knife is instrumental in transforming men and women into adult human beings, removing the female part of the men and softening the females through circumcision.

<sup>8</sup> Interview: SG 7 Sep 2012

regulate their own business according to their own laws. They monitor and correct each other's behaviour, and if necessary, punish those who fail to live up to these laws:

The children who are 7 or 8, starting in first grade to third grade, have started to join as a group, and they know each other's characters. There are the leaders, those who seem to know everything. When they have gatherings, they say, "*Twamɔgaga*" (we have gathered). There are others who will not understand at all. Then they will be taught what it means to gather together. When they meet, the leaders will say, "We are an age-set, so we should not eat together or share a plate with a girl. If we see that you are sharing a plate with a girl, it is shameful, and we will beat you for it."

We are disciplining you with a *nandeeɔ* (punishment). Also, if you are sent by your mother on an errand, and you refuse, that is a *nandeeɔ*. Or if we say we have a gathering, and you refuse to come, it is *nandeeɔ*." They put their own law into place.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the adult life of a man, the strongest social tie will be the one with his age-mates. The blood they shed at the initiation rite has formed a covenant between them, and they are obliged to help each other at times of need.

I cannot refuse a request by an age-mate, because he will say: "Hey, how is it since we are of the same age-set of one blood. I will see (*ninkebana*)."<sup>10</sup> It is my age-set and I can threaten him to pay back (a debt). But because he does not want any quarrels, he will say: "Why, we are of the same age-set, we come from the one blood, I will see." That means he is cursing me because I denied something to him, withheld his things, his property, and this is definitely getting me (the curse) because I withheld somebody's possessions.<sup>10</sup>

The binding power of the circumcision blood regulates the age-group relations because it carries the power of a curse which can be used by age-mates against each other. This is not a common occurrence, but the threat of a curse can be made when an age-mate refuses to comply with a request of another, e.g. the payment of a debt, help to accomplish a project, or even failing to provide hospitality:

Here is an example. Say this man from my age-set, he has come to my place. My wife has failed to cook food for him. Then he will say something like, "In that house, there is no male child." He is cursing because he went to sleep hungry. He did not get food. So he is saying that the woman of the house will not get female children who could help her cook, because it is the woman who wronged him. But if he is talking about me, he will say, "May you not get a male child who inherits from you." I will not get one. And even if I already have a boy, then he will die.<sup>11</sup>

This kind of curse can also be issued against a quarrelsome mate:

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<sup>9</sup> Interview: SG 31 Jul 2011

<sup>10</sup> Interview: AG & SG 17 Sep 2013

<sup>11</sup> Interview: AG & SG 1 Aug 2011

Or, if you have hit him, injured him, he can take some blood and bring it to your house, and put the blood on the door post (*kisego*), at night, or even during the day, this is a very strong way of cursing.<sup>12</sup>

This loyalty of mutual interdependence extends beyond the village boundaries, and even beyond the ethnic boundary. When traveling through Maasai territory, a Temi man receives shelter and food from men of the same age-set (although the Maasai names may be different).

#### 8.4 Female age-sets

In a parallel fashion, though not as prominent in the public conscience, the women also form age-sets. Growing up, the girls are more attached to the mother and spend time doing domestic chores, so that they do not spend as much time among their own as the boys do. FGM<sup>13</sup> is still practised today, despite a government ban. Female circumcision ceremonies are carried out in a more private manner and often disguised as secular celebrations, such as a ‘send-off’ party of a bride, or a fund-raiser for a girl who is about to start her higher education studies.<sup>14</sup> According to Temi beliefs, a girl’s transformation into a woman is more of a natural process which happens over time. There are transformations of the body, the first menstruation, the growing of breasts, and there are incisions on the body, like the piercing of the earlobes or the removal of the clitoris. A girl is able to appear in public and dance with the *batana* at the *mbarimbari* ceremony after she has her earlobes pierced.<sup>15</sup> The vast majority of Temi women are deeply convinced that a girl has to be circumcised in order to become a proper social person, as MR explains:

When a woman is not circumcised she likes to be with men, so that is the reason why we circumcise, we reduce the longing; after circumcision you are a *mwana baka batana*, not *bijɔɔri* anymore, *mwana baka batana wa muradwa*; you receive respect from all the mothers in the community, and also the father will respect you like an adult person; even to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> The Batemi use the same term (*muradwa*) for male and female circumcision. They refer to it as ‘cutting’, rather than ‘mutilating’ the genitals.

<sup>14</sup> NB 15 June 2000

<sup>15</sup> Interview: MR & MW 27 Jan 2012



hit you, he will not hit you anymore, he will not scold you, you have become like your own mother, the same thing although you have not given birth yet.<sup>16</sup>

The women form their own age-sets and have teaching sessions for the girls who are about to be circumcised or, consequently, married. The age-sets of younger and middle-aged women are active in organizing *bukwa* parties during which they celebrate the transition of a girl into marriage. But today, the state of young unmarried girls is in some disarray with numerous girls having babies without being properly married.

### 8.5 *Esabaga* – to cross over

For the men to be initiated into the *communitas* of adult men is a momentous, life-defining moment. Even the Christians who were able to talk openly about their initiation ordeal speak of it with emotion and a sense of awe. Besides imposing social structures and gendered relationships on society, male initiation imparts a definite identity on the novices, as SG explains: ‘You are told that this is *gitemi*! This is what makes us who we are, who we are now.’<sup>17</sup>

To be initiated, that is, to be presented to Kirimo and the concept of *gitemi* as a tradition are interwoven things. It is in the sheltered area where the novices are confronted with the sacred object and where the secret of Kirimo is disclosed. And it is this disclosure which is considered the heart of *gitemi*.

A grown man who has not been brought to Kirimo is treated like a child (*kijɔɔri*). A person who is not initiated cannot be trusted with important affairs, and thus presents a dangerous element in the community. A non-initiated man is not likely to get a wife since no woman wants him as a husband. A man who has not ‘crossed over’ to the men’s side deserves no respect from the women; he is ridiculed and shamed. Such strong moral and social obligations make it clear that male initiation is one of the most contentious obstacles the church in Butemine is struggling with. In the past, church families have failed to protect their sons from being initiated, and there is little change in sight that this will change in the future.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Interview: SG 9 May 2012

The Batemi speak of *ehirwa bijjori nkirimo* (to bring the children to *Kirimo*). *Kirimo* is spoken of as a personified being who desires the children and requests them to be brought to him:

It happened this way; the village of Digodigo circumcised its *bijjori* last year. In the 11<sup>th</sup> month *Kirimo* came and wanted its children to be brought to it. The *bijjori* did this one thing, they sang the songs that they sing. That day they did as they always did. Another day they shaved their heads, they were brought to bathe. They were 'brought'.<sup>18</sup>

The mythological version envisions *Kirimo* as a wild beast which kills and swallows the boys and recreates them as new beings (cf. Eliade 1965, 13–18). *Kirimo* is perceived as an active agent who is moving on his own and making decisions on his own. *Kirimo* can be communicated with through songs and petitions. Thus while the men are aware that they are steering *Kirimo*, they still talk of it as of another being to whom they attribute supernatural powers and unquestionable authority. The novices, after they have actively indicated their desire to be circumcised and have been examined upon their strength and skills, become the passive agent. They are being brought to *Kirimo* by the community of initiated men.

The principle movements of the novices during initiation take place within the secluded area where they move between the shelter (*mutala jwa kijoomi*) and the springs, and the initiation tunnel that lies between two of the ancient village gates. The boys are shaved by their mothers or grandmothers, wear a thin, red leather cape (*esini*), shoes made of leather, and carry their *ndang'uri* stick. The maternal uncles (*maama*) or other male relatives are the sponsors who take care of the novice during the time of his initiation (as they are for his moral development before and after his transition to manhood). The sponsors, together with all the other men, lead the novices to the shelter near the *kijoomi* where, after bathing in the stream, the teaching sessions begin.

Even before *mase* starts, the novices meet with elders on a daily basis for teaching sessions in the sheltered area at the *mutala jwa kijoomi*.<sup>19</sup> However, the more intense, focused instruction occurs when *Monto Mukolo* is present in the village, that is, once *mase* is in full swing. These sessions can take place in individual groups where the relatives, fathers, and older siblings instruct the boys about the new ethical and behavioural standards that are expected of them in the future days. In no uncertain terms, the boys are told that their childhood (*bujjori*) is now over and the new era of manhood (*butana*) begins. The teachings sometimes consist of practical lessons through which the pupils painfully realize

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<sup>18</sup> Interview: AJ 6 July 2007

<sup>19</sup> See figure 14, page 186

their social and intellectual incapacity and acknowledge their dependence on the elders' leadership. For example, they are asked to carry out actions which physically hurt them, or activities which humiliate them. AJ remembers such an episode from his own initiation:

My head was covered with the cape and I was in the dark. Then I heard the elders saying: "Will we be finished (wiped out) by A?! A, will you finish us off?!" I thought to myself: "How should I finish them off?" I completely failed to understand how I can finish them off.<sup>20</sup>

The elders confuse and intimate the novice in order to discard all previous understanding of the world, its social order and moral values, and then instill their *gitemi* values. A vivid illustration of such a didactic method is the following scene, in which school learning is set against traditional knowledge:

An elder was drawing signs in the dirt with a stick and asked me to read it. I was asked: "Can you read this thing?" I did not understand it. I completely failed to know what it said. The elder said: "So you went to school and yet you cannot read? But we are going to teach you now."<sup>21</sup>

At other instances, the novices are asked to put their hand into a pile of dirt. When they do so, their hand is either pierced by thorns or covered with faeces. The lesson to be learned is never to do anything of which they are not sure, or undertake an activity which can cause harm to them. From now on, their adult life requires that they are to tread carefully, as the saying goes: *Butemi ndane n'eggeera karero* (Inside the tradition you have to move carefully). Other teaching subjects are about self-dependency and survival in the wilderness, as AK explains:

This is the teaching the maternal uncle or a relative is giving to the novice. Another sign is a dry leaf, *kihande* (aloe tree), and the *lurende* (fire stick). You are told: "No man is failing any task! If you are in the wilderness you use the fire stick to make fire. *Kihusa* you are grinding, you blow on the fire, so you will not get hurt in any way, nor will you die from hunger. So as a man you have to be strong, firm, and bold." This is the first lesson; secondly, they ask: "Have you ever seen a man without a wife?" Maybe those who have lost a wife. So for a man; firstly, if you join a prostitute you will lose your strength, you will die. Secondly: if you tell this secret to a woman, a *kijɔɔri*, or a Muturi, even to any other person, do not trust in any person. So you are told to be very careful. If you meet a stranger, just pass by without conversing with him or her. Because you do not know who that person is and where he is coming from. Secondly, in the past there were many dangers, each man should have his bow and quiver with a knife, so that whenever you meet a man and he wants to fight, you can use your knife and cut his legs, so that you can use your bow and arrow. This was the teaching we received. Once you have already injured the man, you will have time to use your bow and arrow, and you have saved yourself. And if, for

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<sup>20</sup> Rec: AJ 31 Jul 2006

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

example, a leopard has attacked your age-mate, do not start shooting arrows because you could kill your age-mate. But get your knife out and kill the leopard. Each man is taught this.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, there is a set of teachings about the male anatomy which makes them different from all other human beings. It is the aforementioned secret teaching that they do not have stomachs. This belief about the men's lack of a digestive system may be weaker today among women, but it still affects social behaviour. The taboo of men not having bowel movements explains the failure of many government programmes to build latrines in Temi villages. The men simply refused to be seen entering a communal latrine, or to dig the pits, without giving an explanation for it.

## 8.6 Through the tunnel

The hollow pathway between the two eastern village gates (*kijoomi*) serves as the initiation tunnel. Its outer wall, the one looking toward the village, has been covered with tree branches to make it into a dark tunnel. With a crowd gathered at the entrance of the tunnel, an elder cries out: *Baaba, saayo, na ng'ombe jayyo!* (Father, peace to you and your cattle). This is echoed by the boys several times. Each individual is led through the initiation tunnel by an elder or older *mutana*, where they encounter wild beasts, inhuman creatures, and are asked to perform female chores like grinding grains on a grinding stone, or cooking a meal. The older *batana* and elders are hiding in the thickets in order to scare the novices:

They fire off guns to threaten the novices when they walk through the tunnel. They are using 'Doom' spray (insecticide) and light it with a match, they use explosives, and fire crackers. They use these things to strengthen the boys, those who are entering ... they use wild sounds, of a lion, a hyena, a snake. So we check where they have to pass through, from the top (gate) to the one below, and we scare him. This is how the boys are measured up, tested if they are worthy to be a man. So that they can prevail in a war, to face a wild animal, or any other danger. So from the upper gate to the lower gate, inside there are really severe threats. They may even encounter a man who pretends to be dead.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Interview: AK 10 May 2012

<sup>23</sup> Interview: SG 10 May 2012

Besides the exposure to the dangers of the wild, the boys are asked to carry out humiliating tasks. These gender reversed roles are meant to confuse them and undo all previously learned values, as to prepare them for what is to follow.

They have cut a banana tree and planted it there, and they sit at a grinding stone (you know, the men do not grind grain). So there is an elder and a *mutana*. Once he has repeated the words at the upper *kijoomi*, and encountered the noises, he is really scared, he almost urinates, the elder says: “Cut a banana here,” he cuts it, OK, “Sit here and grind for your mother.” He is given a stone, he gets some millet, he cannot refuse this work. He has to do everything that they demand of him. You are afraid. It is not the custom to grind grain for your mother! Then they request that you call out loudly: “I grind grain for my mother!” And you grind. This is shameful. After that, an elder lies down like a woman, he says: “Sleep with the woman.” Some will be too afraid and fail, they move on. Then there is a snake, there are loud noises, and at the *mureera* tree there is a lion. Maybe at the lion, the boy wants to run away. And suddenly he is caught and covered up, and carried away.<sup>24</sup>

After passing the tunnel, the boys are being led to the *mutala* where they rest. In the meantime, the women are standing within hearing distance outside the initiation tunnel. They cannot see through the thick bushes into the tunnel, but they hear loud noises of growling, gun shots and screaming. The mothers of the novices cry out: “Oioioio”. They wail and start singing the *ekobelana* song, slapping their hands onto the leather skirts (*musuuru*), and beseeching *Monto Mukolo* to spare their children from excessive torture.

## 8.7 Inserting the boys – *etuma ngobi*

These and other lessons about adult life are imparted into the pupils as embodied knowledge, rather than in precise linguistic terms. However, the liminal context in the shelter and the suspense in which the novices make these embodied learning experiences which are associated with *gitemi* have a profound impact on them. Undergoing these experiences triggers the mind to think deeply about one’s behaviour and identity, and prepares the novice for the task that lies ahead (cf. Moore, Sanders, and Kaare 2004, 12-13).

Other teaching subjects include their respect for women and children, the difference between the sexes, their conduct in front of others, their eating habits, the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

story of the removal of their intestines and how they should never be seen relieving themselves. The character of a *mutana* is one who never fails to keep a commitment; he must endure, obey, and succeed.

These teaching sessions are called *etuma ngobi* (to sew a leather cape). When the elders are calling on the novices to gather for these teaching sessions, they say: ‘*Dutume ngobi* (Let us sew the skins),’ and the boys echo, ‘We are sewing the skins!’ An *ngobi* is a thin leather cape that was the traditional piece of clothing; today it is used for ritual purposes or during special ceremonies. The word *ngobi* is currently used for any piece of clothing. The idea behind *etuma ngobi* is the belief that through initiation boys become united with the male group. This process of integrating new members into the collective of the men is compared to the sewing of individual leather pieces into one *ngobi*, whereby the sewing process is the teaching of the elders:

The elders say, “Let us get together and sew skins. And those children of our relatives, let us sew the skins.” This is what it means to ‘sew’. One man is the sewer. It is the act of sewing ‘relationship’. The one who is sewing has the knowledge and ability to sew. He understands the exact ceremonies of the elders.<sup>25</sup>

The words of the teaching are compared to a treasure which needs to be collected and stored, and the container of the words and the wisdom of old is again the cape:

And they have stored up those words about *etuma ngobi*. They remember Bakurise’s words. So when the older men have gone, then the younger ones will be given the opportunity to speak. Even if an older man makes a mistake, the younger man can speak out, “Is that the way *gitemi* went?” That is how he will talk. The others will listen, so we say that those who sew are the elders, those that know *gitemi*. And those who are sewn are the younger people. So the young people are the skin, and the sewer is the elder. The skin, taken as a whole, means the men, all of them. The scrap of skin (*ndaghwa*) is the single young man. Now they are joined together.<sup>26</sup>

The image of the leather cape can also be applied to the work of uniting the different generations of age-groups into a coherent continuum that reaches back into the distant past of their history, as AK explains:

There is Erumarerei, Eligibodi, Erumaga, Erumagero, Erigibali, and Erimeesi (names of age-sets), they are the ones who want to be joined together. They are the skin that has

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<sup>25</sup> Interview: AK & SG 11 May 2012

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. SG

already been sewn together, so what they are sewing on is the younger ones. So each age-set is like skin. So the younger ones are sewn on to the others.<sup>27</sup>

And during the teaching, the metaphor of sewing can be used in a negative sense, as when the elders threaten the novices: ‘*Mukondate ehumeryana balome?! (Do you want to disperse the men by unstitching the cape)?*’ In other words, do you want to undo the work which unites the men?

In a world in which tradition and modernity compete with each other for the young people’s attention, the need for teaching the young men (and women) about *gitemi* is important and critical. SG explains:

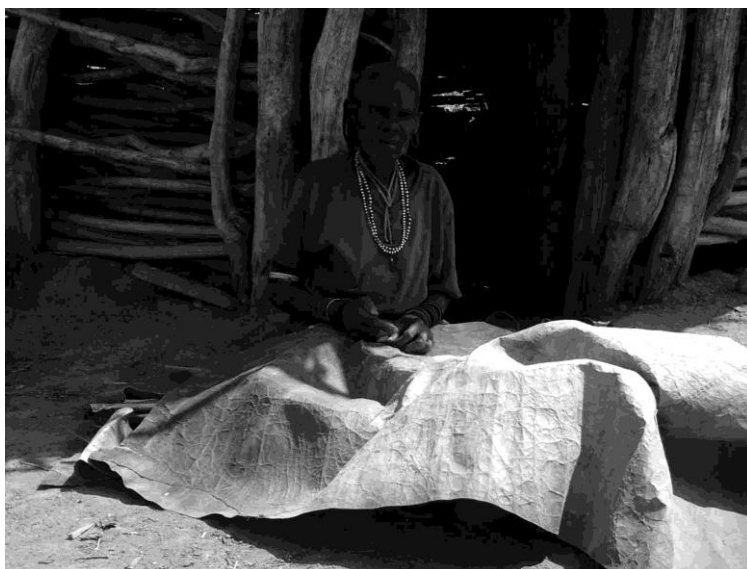
In the past this (teaching) was not there. For example there was no school, or development in general was not here. No school, no TVs, or pubs. So for the *batana* their work was under the regime of the *benamijye*. But when modern things arrived, the young people also started getting an education, working in pubs, or any odd employment at the shops; all these things affected the work of the *benamijye*, they left that. The young people said: “This is from the past.” But the elders prepared what is called *etuma ngobi*, via their age-set, the elders go via the age-set in order to advise them, to counsel them. They say: “Let us not leave our customs, even if development has reached us, schools, but let us not leave behind our customs. That is why they have the *etuma ngobi* meetings.”<sup>28</sup>

While the expression *etuma ngobi* is firmly embedded in male discourse, the activity of sewing leather is in female hands. Leather is cured and used for many domestic and ritual uses such as drying and storing grains, carrying bags, ropes etc. Despite the availability of alternative materials, leather is still preferred because of its durability and flexibility.

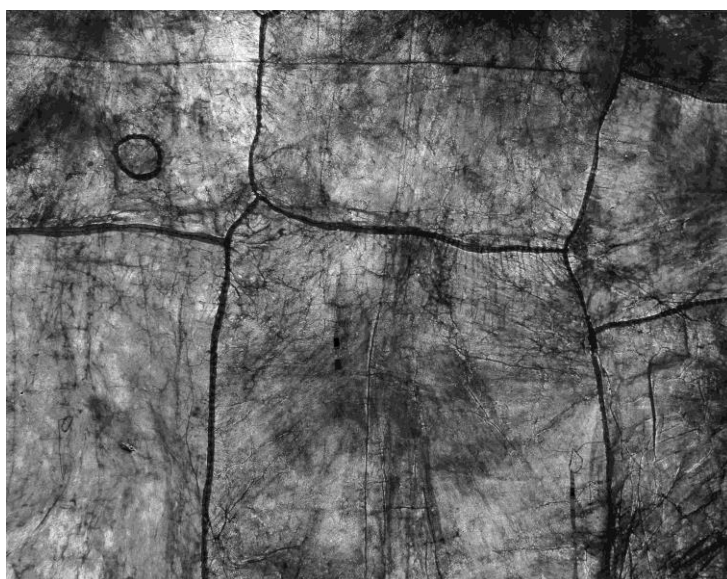
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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. AK

<sup>28</sup> Interview: SG 16 Dec 2011



Photograph 8.1 Temi woman working on a large piece of leather



Photograph 8.2 Section of a traditional ngobi worn by initiates

However, while the expression was originally used for the social process of building a new age-set, the idiom *etuma ngobi* has spread to other cultural domains, for example in the area of informally redressing wrongs, or reconciling conflicting parties by emphasizing *gitemi* etiquettes. Thus the Batemi speak of meetings with the purpose of teaching customary rules or reconciling differences as *etuma ngobi*:

Every meeting has a leader. Among people, the relatives, there is a relative who calls a meeting and he says *etuma ngobi* among family members. Each meeting has its own leader. Let me add something. Leather, as leather (*ngobi*) has many uses. But we use *ngobi* as a picture of the village. This village has people, who are like pieces of leather. The people do not get along, and are separate. The *ngobi* is the entire village, and the people are like leather pieces. To bring them together into one, there is the leader of the village. If he sees



there is discord, he calls them all together. “Why are you doing this? Let us all follow one pattern.” If they all start spreading out, then they are gathered together again

BH: *Etuma ngobi* is a good thing. Without sewing, it is just scraps. *Etuma ngobi* is suitable. Without sewing, then you just have a piece of leather here, and another there. But now it is one good thing that we hold onto. *Tuhabe esegera* (let us stop dispersing).

AK: It is like we told you, when you get along, then you are one piece.<sup>29</sup>

Contrary to the official idea that the women do not use the expression, it is common to hear women using the idiom. For example, MW refers to a reconciliatory meeting in the following way:

*Etuma ngobi* means to reconcile; for example, there is Mama C who had a conflict with her husband. Now Besyu’s clan comes, the *nkaribiari* (daughters), the women, they all meet and bring Mama C and they tell her: “We are the *nkaribiari* (sisters of husband Besyu), *ndogo wa Baba* (from the clan), let us see what the problem is, is it you? Or who is the problem? We came to take you to your husband. *Tugatume ngobi*. To be reconciled. We see whose fault it is, yours or your husband’s.” They take her and bring her to him. They talk about the quarrel. The two parties explain their sides, and the women investigate who is at fault. If it is Besyu, they tell him: “Besyu, you failed her, that is why your wife ran away and divorced you. This is why she hates these things. So Besyu we fine you (*njoko*) and you need to slaughter a cow.” Or if it is Mama C, she needs to slaughter a cow. This is all happening within the clan. If she has to produce a cow, she will take it from her brother. This is called *etuma ngobi*.<sup>30</sup>

However, when hearing *etuma ngobi* the men primarily think of the teaching sessions during initiation. They say: *Gitemi nginyighe balome bonse* (*gitemi* holds all men together). The idea that a man or an entire age-set would separate from the group of men is a highly outrageous thought.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, teaching the novices, and thus inserting new members into the social structure, the elders link the new with past generations. Doing so, the activity of teaching becomes the locus where traditional knowledge is passed on; however, the image of the cape is also one of a container that stores the traditions. Talking with an elder about the meaning of *etuma ngobi*, he reflexively applied it to the very meeting we had:

KD: Who is doing the ‘sewing’ (i.e. teaching)?

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<sup>29</sup> Interview: BH, SG & AK 23 June 2011

<sup>30</sup> Interview: MW 27 Jan 2012

<sup>31</sup> Interview: SG 31 Jan 2012

BH: It is the one who is chairing the meeting. Just as you have called us together here in the office, so you are the sewer. Even at this very moment, because you are writing things down to keep them, you are the sewer! You are doing *etuma ngobi*!

AK: It is a good picture because you are storing up the things that would otherwise be lost.<sup>32</sup>

## 8.8 Pledging allegiance

After passing through the tunnel, the boys are gathered at the shelter. They sit on the ground with all the men standing around them. The kind of secrecy practised by the Batemi considers it necessary to go beyond a warning, or a verbal promise not to disclose the men's secret.<sup>33</sup> In order to bind each novice to the secret of Kirimo, they must take an oath. It is a self-imposed spell (they 'eat' the oath) which calls upon the powers of their ancestors to punish those who do not abide by it. The boys are encouraged to join in the song of the elders which says that anyone who betrays the secret of *Kirimo* to an outsider will be fatally struck down. In the form of songs, the adepts affirm their commitment to conceal the secret of the *Monto Mukolo* and never to reveal it to an outsider. The singing also signals a binding contract between the elders and the novices. From now on, as adult members of the group, their lives will be inextricably connected with the male group, and the secret knowledge and power of *Kirimo*. The *eghuuja lya kalya* song goes like this:

*Mubookya* (an elder) – *birimo mbirere* (Birimo have eaten)

Men – *kalya!* (devour!)

*Mubookya* – *birere baana* (they have eaten the children)

Men – *kalya!* (devour!)

*Mubookya* – *baana na b'ese* (children and the fathers)

Men – *kalya!* (devour!)

*Mubookya* – *balya nsiroori!* (devour the elands!)

Men – *kalya!* (devour!)

*Mubookya* – *balya mariikɔ!* (devour the hearths!)

Men – *kalya!* (devour!)

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<sup>32</sup> Interview: BH, SG & AK 11 June 2011

<sup>33</sup> Temi men consider a verbal agreement as a binding social contract. The word of a man is not treated flippantly. Words issued hastily or thoughtlessly are seen as female behaviour and not worthy of a man.

A sheep is slaughtered and the meat consumed. The skin is put over the fire in a fumigating ritual. Here it is believed that the Bagwe will receive the smoke of the offering, it is thought that they hear the oath.<sup>34</sup> The men throw branches of a thorn tree into the fire, while they start singing:

<i>Oyyo mugoola baaba – eee</i>	The one who betrays the fathers,
<i>Nakye, nakye</i>	may he die, may he die,
<i>Najaghane na jya matumu</i>	he shall be bitten by a snake,
<i>Nakye, nakye</i>	may he die, may he die,
<i>Najaghwe njwa hɔɔra</i>	he shall be pierced by thorns,
<i>Nakye, nakye</i>	may he die, may he die. <sup>35</sup>

These songs are performed before the boys have been shown what the actual secret is. They have heard of the expression *etɔnyerigwa mbogo* (an idiomatic expression meaning, to be hit with a surprise), but they do not know what it is all about. For the disclosure of the secret, the entire group of men is moving up to a place near the springs. Again, the novices sit on the ground while the men gather around them. Then the horn is revealed:

They are shown what *etɔnyerigwa mbogo* means. What is being dropped is the horn. *Mbogo* is the horn. Everybody sees it. The man carrying the horn covered in a skin, all of a sudden drops it, and makes it visible so that everyone sees it. He then demonstrates how the horn is blown; that is what is called *etɔnyerigwa mbogo*.<sup>36</sup>

*Mbogo* is a cowrie shell and is used for decorative purposes on drinking vessels such as calabashes, or on the leather skirts of the mothers. It also is the ornament on the tip of the boys' initiation stick (*ndang'uri*). Symbolically the cowrie shell means luck, blessing, well-being, as AG points out:

*Mbogo* was brought here by the Arabs, but it was not used as monetary currency. It was used as a blessing. I do not have the history of how it was used before the slave trade. The Arabs brought bracelets, shells, and other things. When you have a problem and you see a shell, it is like having luck, like being blessed. It is comparable to the pangolin; if you see one (in the wilderness) it is a great surprise, an unexpected event.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Interview: SG 26 Jan 2012

<sup>35</sup> Rec: AG 3 May 2013

<sup>36</sup> Interview: AG & SG 26 Apr 2013

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

This ritual transfer of the men's secret is named *alai mahe* which means 'open or present your palms', in other words, prepare to receive the gift that is given to you. Because the presentation of the horn is considered a valuable gift:

When the elders show the horn to the youths, they do it with the conviction that this is something good and valuable. So after they have revealed the good thing, the horn, they tie this revelation up, cover it again with the curse; they say that if you do the reverse, the unacceptable and talk about this ... So *alai mahe* is a gift from god, all the men receive it: receiving the secret is also associated with the reception of the *gitemi* law. The horns represent the customary law of the Batemi, they epitomize *gitemi* like nothing else. If you have seen the horn, they say, you have seen *gitemi* because it is hidden within it.<sup>38</sup>

The traumatic experience of being faced with the sacred object which, so they are told, defines their identity has an effect of terror on the novices. The intensity of the moment is increased by the horn blowing, men crying, and *batana* shaking frantically in the grip of a seizure. The deep emotional experience is captured in SG's words:

This is a real threat to the young men, it creates fear, and they are terrified. The words, the threat enters *nkɔlɔ ndane*, into the heart. Even if an age-mate asks you later something about *Monto Mukolo*, you will treat the question with suspicion: "Why is he asking me this? What does it mean? Maybe he is not really initiated and wants to know, maybe he is still a *kijɔɔri*?" So it really stays in your heart completely. Each one is afraid, he has fear. And each one will know that if he discloses it, he will surely die.<sup>39</sup>

The Batemi point to their throat when talking of their *nkɔlɔ* (translated as heart, spirit, or being). The oath of secrecy therefore affects their throat which is blocked from speaking about it, the traumatic experience prevents them from speaking words about it, and they are literally spell-bound.

These proceedings with the disclosure of the horn and the singing take place in the early morning. The boys remain at the area around the springs until the evening. They are not fed any food for the entire time, with the sheltered area heavily guarded to make sure that nobody escapes to get food from outside. The elders who are still hanging out in the sheltered area keep taunting and provoking the boys.

On the final day of their time in the shelter, the boys are presented with long poles (*marimiti* or *maghandala*)<sup>40</sup>. These poles were prepared by older siblings or the maternal uncles and represent the successful passing of the novices. While the group of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Interview: AK & SG 26 Jan 2012

<sup>40</sup> Schäfer interprets these long *maghandala* poles as a symbolical umbilical cord that 'connects the newborn warrior in his post-natal weakness with his "divine" mother' (1999c, 177).

initiates is waiting at the *mutala jwa kijoomi*, eight of the *marimiti* are carried by *batana* to the dancing plaza where a crowd of cheering women and children receive them. The word is said: *Monto Mukolo nahumya marimiti ja baana* (*Monto Mukolo* is releasing the *marimiti* of the children). In other words, they have made it through the passage, they have transitioned from childhood to manhood. It is not until the next morning that the novices are led to their respective homes by their relatives where they are fed and cared for. The initiates are not allowed to participate in the ceremonial dancing on the plaza until the next *mase* cycle.

That afternoon the novices change their dress; for the first time they wear dark-red coloured togas and dance the *Ehoogelwa*, the slow crouched approach to the dancing plaza. Their leather cape is deposited at the *ghuseri*. They proceed around the village, without any weapons, carrying only their short *ndang'uri* stick. When they come back to the Kiritone, they are not allowed to sing; they pass the plaza and enter the sacred grove. Their entry into the men's meeting shelter marks the end of the celebration.

## 8.9 Post-initiation

After initiation, the new *batana* spend their time almost exclusively with their own age-set. Immediately after the days in the shelter, there are more meetings with instruction time. Their first grand meeting with the men of all age-groups is called *bweekerya kajuyyane*. The teaching subject has now shifted to organizational matters and instructions on age-group discipline. The elders remind the new age-set about their responsibilities toward the community: From now on your families and the entire community is depending on you, it is not you depending on them!

You cannot ask your father to provide clothes for you, what you will wear, nor ask him for food, what you will eat. It is your own task to provide all these things. Even if there is need for a goat and there is no goat, you will start no matter what to search for one and buy one. So that when it is your turn to provide a *sedani* (ritual contribution) that you will be able to do so. Or when a friend is getting married that you will be able to get him one.<sup>41</sup>

Further teaching includes building skills, for example how to build a house, a shelter, or a fence. However, the main subject in these meetings are social skills and

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<sup>41</sup> Interview: SG 26 Jan 2012

rules. They talk about maintaining good relationships in the family, how to support and respect each other, how to be self-sufficient and self-dependent.

Furthermore, the novices are introduced to the *baribita*, the age-mates who function as liaison between the age-set and the *etongo*. Also, the *bekorani* (age-set leaders) who have already been appointed beforehand, will be confirmed. Again, the elders remind the new warriors that:

From now on you are an *mwekeria*, a guard, a protector, a guardian of *gitemi*. If the others are sleeping you need to be on guard. You need to be alert at all times, be ready to engage into action. At night you will be the last to sleep and in the morning the first to wake up. You are the *nsombi* now.<sup>42</sup>

In many ways, the initiation period is a time of crisis for the community, a dangerous time that has the potential to bring social structures into disarray. While the novices desire to undergo initiation and be acknowledged as adults, the character of the group which is made up of many individual personalities and its capacity to work together, is unpredictable and far from predetermined. The *benamijye* and the *bekorani* leaders of the older age-sets are very cautious in handing over the reins of protecting the men's secret into younger hands. On the other hand, the older *batana* have to prevent the novices from escaping the ordeal by running away to Loliondo or Arusha. In the past, this has happened and *batana* had to retrieve them from these places and bring them home by force.<sup>43</sup>

Initiation also poses a real dilemma for the local churches, since they consider the idea of being presented to Kirimo as a gesture of submitting to idol worship, to Satan's powers. The time period of initiation brings about an increased tension between the churches and those who hold on to *gitemi* laws (*enyiigha gitemi*). The village community puts great pressure on Christian families to have their sons initiated which frequently leads to interpersonal conflicts in the church and individual families. This is especially hard to handle when it affects a pastor's family, as AJ reports:

There are youngsters in the Pentecostal church who have been saved, like Moni, like Nehemia (the pastor's son). There is Jofasi, Biseni, Sweetbus. Those like Nehemia brought themselves (to be initiated) because they wanted to be like their friends Tumaini and Joshwa. They always went together, and on that day of the Old Man he went with them to have his head shaven. Nehemia was followed by his father, and told him, "I am going." His

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

father told him, “You have left God?!” But Nehemia did not answer him. He left his father and went.<sup>44</sup>

For the Christian boys to be brought forcefully to Kirimo and to submit unwillingly to the ordeal is a shameful experience. There were cases of mature Christian men in their late 20s who were forced to be initiated and immediately returned to the church unscathed of the ritual experience. But an adolescent teenager cannot remain unaffected by such an experience. AJ witnessed the boys coming out of the sanctuary:

And those young people when they returned you would not recognize them anymore as having come from a church. All of them covered their mouths. Many of them were given skins, and they wore them. They stared around at everything, they beat children, and forced children to shave their heads. So you find that they have deserted church matters, there is nothing left inside their minds.<sup>45</sup>

So far, the churches have not been able to withstand the social impetus to initiate every Temi male, despite some attempts to involve the district government and the police. The Temi Christians’ inability to cooperate among different church denominations and discuss possible solutions is a great disadvantage. If they could stand together and present their case as an organized body to the government, the chance of success would much greater.

## 8.10 Baturi initiation in comparison

The Baturi are the clan of the blacksmiths. They live among the Batemi but do not intermarry with them. The Baturi traditionally provided the metal tools and pottery for the *ghorowane* temple, and in return were granted a piece of land to live on. They also produced spears, knives, and bells for the animals. Today their trade has been reduced to the occasional production of temple utensils and the repair of metal ploughs and tools. Furthermore, there is a constant demand for metal arrow-heads which the *batana* use in their hunting expeditions and the warfare against the Maasai.

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<sup>44</sup> Interview: AJ 12 Jan 2008

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The Baturi and the Batemi have a contentious past, yet they maintain an amiable relationship with each other. The Baturi may have been the offspring of a Nilotic group who joined the Batemi when they moved to the present area. The story is told that the Batemi denied them access to water and farmland, so that they moved away eastward until they reached the coast near Mombasa. There the Baturi learned the trades of pottery and blacksmithing and later returned to Butemine again.<sup>46</sup> Today, the Baturi live in separation from the Batemi. They are not allowed to intermarry with the Batemi, and are excluded from farming the land. The belief was that their hands, being affected from the work with fire, would scorch the land and make it infertile.

Another story of their division relates back to the beginning of the Kirimo cult. According to this account, the Baturi refused to take part in the disguise of the horn, and insisted on keeping their faith in the gods Ryoba and Jila.<sup>47</sup> Thus while the Baturi youths are circumcised and part of the Temi age-group system, they do not undergo Temi initiation, nor do the men participate in the *mase* ceremony. The Baturi conduct their own initiation ritual which consists of teachings about ethical behaviour and their history with the Batemi. As part of their instruction, the Turi novices are shown some Kudu horns (which the Turi elders keep hidden for this occasion), and they are told about the disguise of the Temi men. So the Baturi know the secret of the Temi men and therefore pose a potential danger because they could expose the men's cult. However, the Baturi only share this knowledge among themselves, since they would only risk repercussions from the Batemi if they did. The Batemi regard the Turi men as belonging to the same class as their women and children, as AG points out: 'The Baturi make themselves seem like men, but they have been classed alongside women and *bijjori* ... the Baturi are just counted as useless, as women, as children.'<sup>48</sup>

To have grown men who have not been initiated living in the same community unavoidably leads to tensions. One area which creates social frictions is within the Baturi's marriages. Since only the Turi women are allowed to participate at *mase* but not their husbands, these women tend to admire the Temi men and in turn look down on their own for not being 'completed'.<sup>49</sup> The other tension lies in the fact that Turi and Temi men are part of the same age-set which often demands close working relationships

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<sup>46</sup> NB 13 Apr 2011

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Interview: AG & SG 7 Sep 2012

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



in combat situations. This inequality of social status between the two groups became a topic of discussion when the Baturi proved their valour in fighting back the Maasai.

There was a time when the men of Mugholo showed a certain weakness, due to the war of 1995, that war between the Maasai and the Batemi. It was that after the war, the men of Mugholo lost heart. It was the Baturi who refused to let the Maasai burn down Tinaga. So they were the ones who participated with men from various villages to hold back the Maasai. So they showed that they have military strength. And that is the time when these discussions started. “We are the ones who have defended Tinaga so that it was not finished off by the Maasai. If you are our fellow men, why do you leave us? We want to participate with you.”<sup>50</sup>

While the young men of both camps were open to the idea, the Temi *etungu* made it clear that this should never happen:

The Baturi men came to the Batemi elders, who then informed the age-set leaders that the Baturi want to be initiated. They were told that it is not possible. “It is better for us to fight, until everyone has been killed off, rather than having them initiated. It is better for a Swahili person to be initiated rather than a Muturi, since the Muturi is sure to tell all his relatives about it (the secret). The Baturi’s goal is that once they have been initiated, then afterwards they would all be involved and destroy the system.”<sup>51</sup>

Today, many of the Baturi have moved away from the Temi area and settled elsewhere. The remaining few are spread in the villages of Tinaga, Mugholo, and Ebwe. There are only two men who continue to work as blacksmiths, and one woman who is doing pottery. Unfortunately, none of their children are interested or willing to learn the trade and continue the Turi tradition.

## 8.11 Conclusion

Temi male initiation is about the transformation of boys into men. The transforming process is one of practical engagement with the sacred object, the horn of Kirimo, to which the novices establish an ambiguous relationship of imparted information, threats, and an oath which binds and unites them with the other initiated men. Their experience is ambiguous because they receive teaching, but do not really understand. The sacred object is disclosed to them, but they are told not to speak about it. In fact, the source of power which is assigned to Kirimo is elusive as it rests in the men’s own being, and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

their own complicit behaviour. In the meantime the women, children, and Baturi play their role as the cultural other, as the other gender or non-initiated males. The male dominant position is only possible in a cultural framework with others who are complicit protagonists in this game. At the same time, the women, children and Baturi pose a potential danger in that they can discover the male secret.

In the last chapter I will consider how Temi identity affects the work of the church and what we can conclude in a comparison of the Temi and Christian make-up of the human person.



## Chapter 9

*We have imprisoned our own conceptions, by the lines which we have drawn in order to  
exclude the conceptions of others.*

(S.T. Coleridge, in G. Lienhardt, Social Anthropology)

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

### 9.1 Introduction

This research asked the question of the nature of Temi religion and developed to demonstrate how various representations by outside observers contrast with how the Batemi experience and express religion themselves. Rather than using an outside notion of religion, tradition, or world-view, I considered Temi attitudes, concepts, and images of their customs. However, besides pointing out the discrepancies between the outsider's and insider's perception, the Batemi also clearly distinguish their customs and traditions from those of the Maasai and other Bantu societies.

In the course of the last sixty years, Temi religion has been read mainly through a vision of Western religion and thereby its true nature misrepresented. Outside observers such as colonial personnel, missionaries, and anthropologists have failed to understand how the Batemi experience their religion, how they engage with and manipulate religious symbols, or what the motivation and intention of their ritual practices is. They failed to interpret Temi religious expressions because they were fixed on the idea of religion as belief in a supreme God – which they identified in Temi religion as Ghambageu. The cultural dyslexia which hampered these observers' understanding of Temi religion rendered the deeper aspects of Temi religious traditions unintelligible.

Whether this misreading of Temi religion was corroborated actively by the *benamijye* in order to weaken the impact of Christianity among the Batemi (as Vähäkangas believes), or whether it was due to a lack of more persistent cultural research on the observer's side, or whether the Batemi's secretive demeanour prevented the outsider from gaining access to their religious activities, the portrait rendered of Temi culture had significant consequences. In the case of the Protestant and Catholic missionaries who for the most part neglected or avoided Temi religious practices, the

comparison between Ghambageu and Jesus Christ ultimately failed to produce a viable Christian community.

In this last and concluding chapter I want to summarize the main findings of my research, state its significance and conclude with some suggestions of further implications for mission studies.

## **9.2 Coming to terms with Temi culture**

As we have seen in the presented material, Temi religious traditions must not be understood as compartmentalized and dislodged from quotidian life. Rather, religion penetrates all cultural domains and is co-extensive with their irrigation-based agriculture, kinship relations, and political life. Individuals grow to be a Mutemi person through specific experiences in time and space during which they acquire knowledge about the world, and about themselves. These processes of gaining knowledge occur predominately through ritual participation, that is, knowledge is transferred through behaviour modification, discipline, and constant iteration. Such an epistemology which favours the body as the medium of human experience is reflected in my choice to focus on Temi ceremonies and initiation rituals. These rituals are understood as social and religious processes through which the Batemi construct and render meaningful the world they call their home.

The research describes how from the very first encounter between the Batemi and Western outsiders, Temi elders willingly provided them with information about their culture and religion. These accounts were consequently construed into embellished versions of Temi religious beliefs about Ghambageu. Meanwhile, while these partial accounts of their religion continued to be handed down to other observers, the Batemi were able to keep the more essential practices, especially the occult rituals of *mase* and the powerful worship of Kirimo, out of sight from intruding eyes.

Even if the British colonial presence in Butemine did not make any remarkable impact on the Temi way of life or its social structures, the collective picture drawn set a lasting paradigm and influenced successive interpretations of Temi religion. Thus the anthropologist Gray, who recycled the Ghambageu myths collected by the British colonial officer Fosbrooke, was impelled to conclude that Temi beliefs are all about ‘a supernatural being called Khambageu’ (1963, 97). Gray then depicted Temi religion as a conservative force which motivated Temi men and women to refuse any change in

their lives, either technological, agricultural, or religious. Even the prohibition of raising cattle was explained by a religious decree issued by Ghambageu. On the other hand, Gray pointed out that it was the common belief in Ghambageu which provided the social glue to unite the Batemi into a single society.

The Lutheran Church was, early on in its encounter with the Batemi, thrown into a battle of opposing religious convictions. The missionaries deemed the local beliefs and practices as pagan traditions from which the Christians should distance themselves, while the Temi elders were resentful because the newly established church divided the village community into two camps. Vähäkangas, reviewing the history of the Lutheran Church's mission, referred to this conflict as the 'clash of myths' (2008a, 72). Along with previous observers, he conceived Temi religion as a belief system. Christianity and the cult of Ghambageu were seen as competing ideologies with Temi elders and the missionaries interlocked in antagonistic discourses. Each side was trying to convince its home constituency about the validity and relevance of their own beliefs, while discarding the other. Rather than using ritual oaths to oppose the Christians (which would be more in line with their cultural habits), Vähäkangas holds that the *benamijye* advanced 'rational' and 'intellectual' arguments through which they portrayed their own religion as more credible than Christianity. The main rationale supposedly cited by the *benamijye* was that Ghambageu already represents the values which Christianity attributes to Jesus Christ – there was therefore no need to shift to the Christian faith. Temi religion is thus seen as an example of an African Traditional Religion (ATR) which exhibits dynamic adaptability, rather than being passive and submissive toward Christianity and Western impositions.

At the time when their first mission station was established in Soyeta, the Roman Catholic Church underwent a period of revival and redirection with a fresh understanding of the nature of the church and its mission. Roman Catholic theology perceived African cultures in quite a different light than the Protestant neighbour; African religious traditions were to be appreciated and appropriated as means to inculturate the Gospel. The Church should not cast a foreign notion of religion over them, as if it were an accoutrement. This theory of inculturation which saliently featured in the Vatican II resolution, was received with much enthusiasm and injected new motivation among their missionaries. However, the reality in the mission field proved to be more complex.

There was a curious paradox in the Catholic missionaries' approach to Temi culture in that, on the one hand, they acknowledged and appreciated the indigenous

customs, such as initiation and fertility rites. On the other hand, they never managed to lodge the Gospel into these core domains. Eugene Hillman and Vincent Donovan (Donovan 2003; Bowen and McLaren 2011; Donovan 1989; Hillman 1993a) pondered and wrote about an incarnational ministry with great perception, yet they could never positively convince the Temi elders that Christianity was right for them. Donovan made significant compromises with earlier mission policies by appropriating local Temi symbols in the performance of the Christian sacraments. All the same, he concentrated his main efforts on a theological assimilation between Ghambageu beliefs and the Christian creed. It was the creed he considered as the core expression of religion, believing that commitment to the Christian creed would eventually transform society. However, he quite explicitly dismissed Temi ritual practices and ceremonies, such as *mase*, as unworthy of any serious study.

In a sense all outsiders – from the first colonial accounts to the writings of the anthropologist Gray, and the Christian missionaries – based their representation of Temi culture on similarly narrow and partial data of Temi beliefs in the mythical figure of Ghambageu. Yet, despite such a belief-centric reading of Temi culture, the Batemi themselves did not find much appreciation for Christianity. In many ways it left the missionaries wondering why, despite the congenialities between Ghambageu and Jesus Christ, the Batemi would not show more interest in the church. The history of the past decades has made clear that the hope of the missionaries was not fulfilled. After almost seven decades of evangelization efforts, the result was but a handful of small Christian communities which are scattered throughout Butemine. These churches are, figuratively speaking, situated at the periphery of society with little impact on the traditional culture, its transformative processes, and its socio-political institutions.

### **9.3 Temi religion as *gitemi* beliefs and practices**

In the main body of the thesis I drew a contrasting view of the Temi world, one that is not primarily anchored in myths or beliefs. This alternative representation proposes that the centre of gravity of Temi culture lies in their practical ritual engagement and the use of nature and natural objects to reproduce their culture. I demonstrated how the Batemi employ language, behaviour, and objects in symbolic ways to bring about personal and group transformation. It is via the use of symbols and images, such as the horn of

Kirimo, the leather skin, water and fields, village and wilderness, that gender and sex are shown to be entangled and separated in complex ways. In the course of my field research, and with the help of Temi contributors, I pursued as much as possible an indigenous understanding and representation of their culture.

The root metaphor and central concept of Temi customs is called *gitemi*, which stands broadly for their traditional laws and the beliefs about the nature of the world, and can therefore be conceived as a their religion. While *gitemi* encompasses implicit beliefs in proper behaviour, respect for others, and the efficacy of ritual action, *gitemi* also stands for knowledge about the nature of the world and human existence, and how to relate to the unseen world. This knowledge grows throughout a person's life, but is especially imbibed during childhood and adolescence through the imitation of role models such as older siblings or members of older age-sets, and through repeated ritual participation. *Gitemi* is thus understood as the embodied know-how of social behaviour, the habitus which embraces the necessary cultural skills and knowledge to conduct a meaningful life, and eventually pass as an adult member of society.

The preliminary chapters two and three discuss Temi ecology and history. These chapters do not just provide a general framework for the main argument, but contribute to the main topic which aims to identify the nature of Temi religion. The home territory and the arrangement of spaces, the unique ecological context, as well as their historical past are crucial features of the Batemi's identity. *Gitemi* customs are integrally linked up with their home territory, and have little relevance outside the Butemine area. Each village has its designated areas where customary rituals are performed; there are gendered spaces where men, women, and children are allowed to be, or where their presence is restricted. There are other places that only acquire special significance during ceremonial times. In terms of Temi history, there were external reports about the Batemi that influenced their identity, as well as their own internal accounts, such as oral narratives, songs, or memories. *Gitemi* is also referred to as 'the things of the past,' and the images and concepts that are stored in these memories are integral parts of their traditions.

Furthermore, I highlighted – despite my critique against his assigned religious role – the significant part Ghambageu played in the history of the Batemi. He was in many ways an agent of great changes of Temi traditions and its political structures. By invoking village elders to the position of autonomous leadership, he superseded a clan-based governance with an all-inclusive authority which would govern over the village community and its territory. Furthermore, according to Temi mythology, Ghambageu



was the founder of the water sources and thus laid the basis for a sustainable agricultural existence. However, in terms of religious significance, his influence in the Kirimo and *mase* rituals has undergone a marked shift. Today, his position as a religious figure has become ambiguous, if not completely insignificant.

In the chapters 5-8 I presented the data of my main argument which consists of a combined insider and outsider perspective of the formative ritual events and ceremonies, foremost of which is the ceremony of *mase*. Temi ceremonies, as well as the rites of passage, are embedded in seasonal cycles and evoke different moral attitudes in the community. Interpreting events and human action with reference to the temporal framework of seasonal and life cycles is paramount for understanding their meaning. While during the *mbarimbari* season people are joyful and gregarious, the mood at the *mase* season is more sombre and serious. The Temi annual calendar, not unlike the Christian calendar, consists of preparatory as well as celebratory phases. For the *benamijye*, the custodians of *gitemi*, the preparation of the major *ghorou* is their most important task and they are absorbed with planning these events a great deal. The high-time of the year takes place when Kirimo is ‘coming home’ to visit the village community during *mase*. The horn of Kirimo symbolizes the power and pride of Temi identity, a moment when men and women meet for public dances and symbolic union. As has been outlined in detail, *mase* also represents the symbolic union of male and female, represented as the low and high voices of Egantwalu and Nankone, the male and female Bagwe who are part of Kirimo.

*Mase* is also the time when young men are being initiated into the age-set, as outlined in Chapter Eight. Here the religious and social aspects of Temi traditions intertwine as groups of young men are formed into new age-sets and linked to previous generations. It is also an important time in which gender relations are established and age-hierarchies are stabilized. The climax of male initiation takes place when the horn of Kirimo is revealed to the initiates who pledge absolute allegiance with an oath never to release the male secret, and to abide by the strict rules of the age-set. The ritual insertion of individual members into an age-set, and the acceptance of a new age-group into the fold of adult men is expressed in the metaphor *etuma ngobi*, to sew a leather cape. The social embeddedness of the individual member and his interdependence with the group could not be expressed more graphically. In the meantime, women have their own age-class system which is subject to the women’s own secrets. But it is *mase* with its image of the symbolic union between male and female powers that produces offspring who will carry on with the *gitemi* tradition. This belief is couched in secret

songs which are performed by elders during the *mase* dancing as instructions for the young initiates.

On a socio-political level, another power game is displayed when the women appeal to Kirimo in songs of supplication. While the women are normally subject to male dominance, here they claim authority over the men since they gave birth not only to the elders, but also to the Bagwe. This reversal of gender roles reminds the men that it is only in mutual respect and cooperation with their women that they can survive. While the public display of Temi gender relations depicts a stark asymmetry with a predominant male governance over the female, there are clear indicators that the relationship between the two sexes is more complex. Staging the Kirimo cult may demonstrate male superiority, but the underlying reality is that only a complementary sexual relationship between men and women will bring forth prosperity and a secure future.

Even today, the locus of cultural reproduction lies in their initiation rites, and the celebration of *mase* through which gendered and mature beings are formed. In other words, the heartbeat that keeps Temi society alive is found in the way the Batemi experience social and cosmological realities. As demonstrated in the description of male initiation processes, it is through such performances that the Batemi imagine themselves as men and women, as juniors and elders. And it is through the men's relationship to the horn of Kirimo that they achieve a privileged social status of respect and leadership. Through the cult of Kirimo, Temi society represents itself, and without these religious rituals, the Batemi fear that social and cosmological order would collapse.

By describing Temi ceremonies and their implications on the Batemi's moral imagination, I demonstrated how the practice of secrecy and social relationships are intertwined. Secrecy is really a mode of sociality, rather than being about a specific piece of knowledge which the men hide from the women. Secrecy is the institutionalized form in which the Batemi men and women learn how to relate to each other. But the practice of the secret of Kirimo also catapults the men into a predicament from which they cannot disentangle themselves. The problem they face is that while they may gain social and religious privileges over the women, they find themselves burdened with the rigid and severe rule of Kirimo. Failure, or even negligence to keep this law will unquestionably result in the death of the offender. The men may know that the entire law is self-imposed, but they dare not release the secret to the women out of fear that the curse of their ancestors would fall upon them. This is why the elders paradoxically see *gitemi* as both, something very dangerous that could kill them, but

also something existentially indispensable that they need to hold on to. This pursuit of *gitemi* is thus a constant worry to the *benamijye*, their fellow elders, and the other men, because they fear losing the foundation which their forbearers provided for them.

Another aspect of Temi religion I highlighted is the distinct way the Batemi relate to the things which they consider sacred, that is, the symbolic action they take to consecrate objects. For example, the horns of Kirimo – the key symbol of male dominance and Temi identity – are kept wrapped up in a large leather skins when not in use. Even when they are ‘activated’, they are still kept hidden under outstretched leather capes in the men’s procession around the village. In analogous fashion, the sacred stones in the *ghorowane* shrines (*maghasi*) are also wrapped in leather whenever they are handled. Furthermore, leather is also the protective material used when dealing with the sacredness in human beings. For instance, the young male initiates are completely covered by leather skins during the crucial moment before and after the secret of Kirimo is revealed to them. And women in their reproductive phase wear *misuuru* leather skirts that protect their private parts. In each of these cases, the disclosure of what is kept hidden means immediate danger. There is a clear homology between the treatment of the horn, the *maghasi* stones, the initiates and women which suggests that special attention is needed to these objects because it is through them that the community relates to divine beings (Bagwe) and to their ancestors, but also to the future. All of them are part of a religious system which has developed over time and serves them to address social, political, and religious needs. Kirimo transforms boys into men and thus orders society into an age hierarchy, and it also settles the relationship between men and women. The sacred stones of the *ghorowane* are the symbolic objects through which the priests communicate. People believe in the power of the Bagwe and the magic medicine that the *baghorowane* dispense. And last, the initiated boys are the promise and hope of the next generation that will carry on and preserve the *gitemi* tradition in the future.

Lastly, I have tried to show how Temi rituals and ceremonies must not be seen as fixed calendar events that take place like a modern holiday. These celebrations are carefully and strategically planned, and they are contingent on other events which can unexpectedly disrupt or upset the course of a ceremony. Disruptions can be caused by a co-occurring famine, a lack of resources like dried grass for thatching the shrines, or honey to brew beer, or the case of decayed Kudu horns which were no longer useable. In such cases, the *benamijye* have to intervene quickly and make decisions how to proceed with the ceremonial programme. The *benamijye* thus often manoeuvre around obstacles that impinge their intentions. Some obstacles are only minor distractions and

can be settled or avoided easily. However, other impediments have persisted and stayed as long-term intrusions into Temi culture, for example the presence of Tanzanian government, religious institutions like churches and mosques, and educational institutions. These are, of course, impediments the *benamijye* cannot control or avoid, so they have to find a compromising solution and adapt to a new situation vis-à-vis these institutions. Whatever the difficulties there may be, the *benamijye* have expressed it numerous times to me that to steer the community through these times is always precarious, filled with potential dangers lurking from a wrong decision within the *etongo* leadership, or from outside adversity.

#### 9.4 Reappraisal of Temi religion and fresh approaches

The trend towards a monolithic concept of African religion which culminated in the notion of African Traditional Religion (ATR) further encouraged missionaries and missiologists to construe comparative theologies as points of dialogue between Christianity and other faith systems. As we have seen, Christian missionizing among the Batemi was carried out in a paradigm of a contextualizing Christology that tried to shift belief in Ghambageu towards belief in Jesus Christ. Even though their mission efforts were grinding to a halt, the question whether the two beliefs were of the same, or at least similar nature, or whether Ghambageu was indeed the focal point of Temi religion was never asked.

Instead of a theology of Temi religion, I have suggested a praxeology of their religious traditions. However, the question remains, what an alternative cultural model can offer in terms of an improved communication between Christians and other Batemi. How can Temi religious symbols, metaphors, social structures, or behaviour be incorporated into this inter-religious dialogue? I suggest that more Temi symbols and metaphors should be employed and used by Temi Christians and outside missionaries. Symbols such as water as the source of life and as the never-ending movement which surpasses the lifetime of many generations; rock as the ever-enduring substance; the bridge as safe passage over danger; *sedani* offerings which signify sharing of resources and blessings for all; the goat as proto-typical sacrifice and the goat skin which signifies social unity and reconciliation. Furthermore, there is the *mute*, which means both a tree and a meeting, and in churches is used to denote the cross. Thus the *Mute jwa Yyesu*

could mean ‘the cross of Jesus’ or the ‘meeting place of Jesus’ which is, after all, the church. Many other symbols can indeed be applied effectively and built into the church’s dialogue with the local community. Even if there may not be the perfect ‘redemptive analogy’ (cf. Richardson 2005), there is a wide range of cultural homologies that will find an echo within Temi society.

To the Roman Catholic missionaries who professed more openness toward African cultures, it came naturally to adopt Temi symbols in their Christian ministry. Donovan and the other Fathers thus applied goat fat, or the branch of a tree, or a fly whisk as a sign of blessing. They used a spread-out leather cape as an altar, and encouraged singing and praying in the vernacular Gitemi.

The research has underpinned that the Batemi live in a sacramental world in which the human senses play an important role in the transmission and communication of social realities. For example, group consensus, the redressing of social wrongs, healing, transformation or restoration of the person are processes that are sealed with the application of goat fat, or the consummation of honey beer and goat meat. This kind of commensality makes a powerful statement and brings cohesion to the community. It needs to be reconsidered as analogous Church practice.

In the process of translating the Bible with Temi Christians, we discussed various possibilities of contextualizing the Gospel through music and songs. As a result, Gitemi songs from church choirs were recorded and distributed. The musicians and singers adapted Temi melodies and supplied Christian lyrics to them. The combination of familiar music merged with new texts was generally appreciated by people of all ages. One of the choruses picks up the image of ‘crossing over’ (*esabaga*) which is used to refer to initiation. One of the choruses runs like this:

Let us cross the ravine, let us cross the ravine.  
We tell everyone that they should come.  
They should come and cross over.  
They should cross that ravine.  
I want to call the people of Raghari.  
I told them, Come. Come let us cross, let us cross the ravine.  
Before the floods come.  
If you see the flood,  
You will not be able to cross any more.  
The ravine has a bridge, the bridge is Jesus.  
The ravine itself will be saved.  
Jesus himself is the bridge.  
Now let us tell our relatives ...

Among this collection of songs, other concepts and images which reverberated strongly in both the Christian and the Temi contexts were: *Yyesu ni nkɔndɔ* (Jesus is the

way), *saayo ya Yyesu* (the peace of Jesus), *ng'adaba* (sin, transgression), and *riiso lya mai* (God as the source of life, the water spring).

On a more exacting level, Bible translation forced us to engage with the complexities of biblical and cultural exegesis. We discovered that some biblical key terms had no immediate equivalent expression in Gitemi. Terms like God, Holy Spirit, Messiah, sin, forgiveness, repentance, church, and so on, proved problematic to translate because of the vast differences in the make-up of the respective worlds. For example, the word *ng'adaba* in Gitemi can mean 'breaking of a taboo, failure to respect one's kin or age-mate'. The term is close enough to be associated with the biblical meaning of sin. However, it does not cover the biblical meaning since it only extends to a failure in regard to a limited range of people. Moreover, it never means an offence against God, and is quite distinct from the word '*etonya*' which is a sin against *gitemi* and Kirimo. Also, a woman or child could never *etonya* - their wrong-doing is known as *ng'adaba* or by another word, *ehombya*, which is akin to 'making a mistake'. Therefore, while the denotative meaning of *ng'adaba* may be clear enough, the connotative meaning released quite different effects. The problem is that some semantic implications are hidden and not easily measurable, especially not by a non-native speaker. Words, then, are rather like the tip of the iceberg, keeping the deeper senses hidden away (cf. Gutt 2006). A translation that does not consider this becomes ambiguous in its communication.

In our discussions with Pentecostal, Lutheran, and Catholic Church leaders there was a tendency to shy away from the use of religious Gitemi vocabulary. Especially the Pentecostal Christians disliked the use of local religious terms in the translation of biblical texts. For example, they preferred to borrow the Swahili term *nabii* for 'prophet', instead of using the Gitemi coinage *mutalongi wa Mugwe* (announcer of God). The word *mutalongi*, they felt, would mislead the readers to think of the Mutemi elder who converses with Kirimo. In the same way they rejected the Gitemi word *ghorowane* for 'priest, temple, sacred space', and instead preferred the Swahili *mkuhani*, *hekalu*, or *takatifu* respectively. Again, a clear distinction between their Christian faith and the local traditions was the preferred solution. The Gitemi Bible translation, according to some church leaders, should reflect its distinct difference from Temi religion, not its similarity.

However, the concept *gitemi* affects an even wider domain because of its multiple associations with Temi social identity. It is not helpful to simply call it the Batemi's tradition, or their customs, because that is too unspecific. In the context of Bible

translation, the wider notion of *gitemi* could be used to underscore social order, law, wisdom, good behaviour, justice, even truth. It compares more readily with what the ancient Egyptians called *ma'at*, a sense of direction, and a notion of navigating through the world (cf. Jaeger et al. 2004, 454 ff.). Likewise, *gitemi* may also be compared to the concept of Thora (Gr. Nomos) in the Old Testament scriptures. The Thora is understood as God's teaching to His people as well as the more clearly stipulated legislative rules which they were to follow. However, the Thora represents the core element of Judaic life, the pulse of life without which the people of Israel would not have been able to survive. A comparison of the Hebraic characteristics of the law and *gitemi* carries other corresponding similarities: keeping the law had not in itself salvific consequences, but was a sign of membership. Being part of the community entitled one to receive the promised blessings. In a similar fashion – although the idea of 'salvation' is a foreign concept to the Batemi – they become full members of the community through initiation (for the male) and child bearing (for the female) and following *gitemi* is a mark of their membership and also a way of finding orientation and order in their world. This notion of 'covenantal nomism' – so E.P. Sanders in his book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) – may prove useful for a comparative reading of the Bible and Temi culture. Understanding the function of *gitemi* is paramount for church and mission activities in their attempt to communicate the Gospel news. Understanding the many facets of *gitemi* could open up new possibilities, for instance, to imagine the church in terms of 'participationist eschatology', a community of believers who is justified by faith, rather than by keeping the law. Exploring such and similar notions may prove helpful in bridging the way from the realm of *gitemi* to what the Bible calls the kingdom of God.

The Batemi do not easily display their identity in front of others, nor do they allow others to intrude into their affairs. Their instinctive reflex is to protect and defend their own cultural identity, rather than disclose it to others. However, Temi elders, along with the junior age-sets, and the women – each group in their own sphere – treasure their capacity to decide over their own lives. The mastery of skills over, and knowledge of, the *gitemi* reproduction processes is a central aspect over which they want to keep control, because it is the *modus vivendi* that marks who they are. Today, the *benamijye* are under pressure from various sides, but they are still in charge of running their affairs. Should they lose their auctorial powers to exercise control in their world and lead their communities according to the ancestral traditions, who knows what social disequilibrium this would bring about in Temi society?

## 9.5 Implications for further mission studies

The study of the history of Christian mission among the Batemi reveals not only how the Church has failed to make any significant impact in Temi society, but also how little is understood of Temi culture and its religious traditions. This misapprehension of Temi religion applies, of course, to different degrees to foreigners and local Temi Christians. However, there is a remarkable absence of engagement and dialogue between the Church and Temi culture. Except for issuing wholesale condemnation of Temi practices, the Christians and missionaries do little to consider and bring into discussion the cultural spheres with which the adherents of *gitemi* are mostly concerned: transformative processes, moral accountability, gender relations and sexuality, and political leadership. The first wave of Christian mission in the 1950s and 1960s had stirred genuine interest among many young Temi men in the message of the Gospel and an expanded understanding of God. Many joined the Lutheran or Catholic Church and received religious teaching, but somehow they were disappointed by the marginal power Christianity had on their lives and on their life circumstances.

What are some of the lessons to be learned by this study of Temi religion that can be applied to mission work among traditional societies today? Is it worth bothering about a remnant of ‘vanishing tribes’ (Knighton 2005, 258), or engaging in the study of single communities as a kind of salvage operation to at least save a description of their traditions before they disappear?

Firstly, the religious traditions of the Batemi need to be considered as their own genuine practices and beliefs, and not as invented, or imposed, or interpreted by outsiders (Spear 2003; Kratz 1996; Kratz 1993; Handler and Linnekin 1984). Although changing in the course of Temi history, these traditions reach back to pre-colonial times, and today show little sign of disappearing. The *benamijiye* have a strong sense of the enduring and persisting quality of *gitemi* which, after all, outlasted the colonial period, Maasai interventions, and the Church’s presence. *Gitemi* beliefs help them to think in long-term categories which stretch over many generations in which the Germans, the British, and the missionaries are only recent occurrences. However, these traditions are not simply stereotypical repetitions of the past, but actively reworked and negotiated out of the beliefs which were handed down to them by previous generations. Temi traditions are flexible and adaptable to serve the need of current circumstances. Old and forgotten practices may be remembered and reapplied, while others gradually fade away. As the study has pointed out in the case of the outsiders’ observations, Temi



elders tend to conceal whatever concerns the inner workings of *gitemi*, and disclose versions of their beliefs which are marginal or insignificant to them. Thus Ghambageu is offered as a religious figurehead, because he is of marginal significance in Temi religion today.

A second lesson from this study is that in the large and diverse landscape of African traditional cultures and religions, each society is truly different and deserves to be recognized and studied as such. If Temi religion is scrutinized according to religious categories found in most other Bantu groups, the result would be rather disappointing. A more appropriate approach, as suggested in this research, is to examine what the important and ultimate life issues are that a people is trying to resolve, and how these affect their social and political make-up. Such an approach directs attention to the significant religious actors who act on behalf of the community, and the symbols, objects, and behaviour they employ to accomplish their intentions. Only by scrutinizing how religion is constructed through social relationships, such as gender and age-hierarchy, will its unique nature and quality become visible. In comparison to other East African traditional societies and their traditions (Wijsen and Tanner 2002; Beidelman 1997b; Moore 1977; Moore, Paul, and O'Barr 1977; Kenyatta 1962; Spear and Kimambo 1999; Spear and Waller 1993b; Shetler 2007; Shetler 2002; Sandgren 2000; Kratz 2010; Worthman 1987), Temi religion is marked by a centralized leadership called *etongɔ*, and two overlapping and socially intertwined occult traditions known as *ghɔrɔwane* and Kirimo which both are part of *gitemi*. The peculiar form Temi religion acquired over the course of its history may be attributed to its geographical situatedness with village clusters around perennial water sources, and the vicinity to Oldonyo Lengai. Organizing a society based on agricultural irrigation meant shifting social authority from clan to village leadership, a transition which presumably happened with the arrival of Ghambageu. The constant flow of water also explains the absence of a rainmaking cult which is common in other East African groups. Secondly, sharing Oldonyo Lengai with the Maasai as the Mountain of God must have suggested that it is also the home of Kirimo who represents the image of Temi society and its reproductive powers.

A further important insight to be learned from the Temi case as presented in this research emerges from a comparison of different modes of beliefs. The nature of belief, and what it means to believe in a religious sense remains the subject of extensive debates (Cannell 2006; Engelke 2007b; Engelke 2002; Larsen 2014; Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008; Robbins 2001; Robbins 2007; Howell 2003; MacGaffey 1981;

Malley and Barrett 2003; Cox 1993; Ruel 1982). Is belief a social fact (Emile Durkheim), a psychological phenomenon (William James), or a universal human faculty which signals faith in a higher being? And how is an outside observer to know what people believe, given the fact that he or she cannot directly read their minds? What forms the grounds of the observer's conclusion about their belief: expressed opinions, myths, prayers, public discourse, or observed practices? In the case of the Batemi, the research has shown that a Western concept of religion based on the primacy of beliefs does not correspond with the Temi notion of religion. Beliefs and moral values may be implicit in Temi religion, yet they are not the central point of their religion, nor are they the topic of theological discussions. The mode of being in the world, of relating to other members of society, and of handling unseen forces is vastly different from a presumed Western model. Rather than translating 'inner lives' on the basis of what one is told by the insider, religious convictions should be inferred from how people behave toward those things which are attended to with utmost care. Temi culture as a whole may be ritualistic, but it is not necessarily always religious.

It is said that African men and women were captured by 'the poetry of the (Christian) religion' (Spear and Kimambo 1999, 19). However, taken in reverse, it must be stressed that there is a measure of poetry in Temi religion which can, if studied carefully, serve as the basis for a fruitful dialogue. If the church wants to plant the Christian message of God's love into their midst, she is advised to respect the Batemi's traditional governance system and its decision making processes. Because for the Temi elders and the *benamijye*, it is without doubt impossible to exist without *gitemi*, as they readily quote the saying, *gitemi gitibunekaga eguha*, which translates: *Gitemi* is unbreakable as a bone.



## 10. APPENDIX

### 10.1 Glossary of Gitemi Terms

- ba dang'uri *n* newly circumcised boys
- ba mujogo jutune *n* priest, 'of the red bracelet'
- ba muringa *n* good friends, 'of the beehive'
- ba ngi jya bituru *n* derogatory nickname for Maasai, 'flies on the shoulders'
- baana ba baka ba batana *n* girls after circumcision
- baana ba baka ba bijoori *n* girls before circumcision
- baghorou *n* participants in a ritual or celebration
- baghorowane *n* priests, 'of the temple' (sing. *mughorowane*)
- Bagwe *n* the gods, *bagwe* (sing. *Mugwe*)
- Bahumba *n* 1) ethnic group in Kenya 2) ancient name for the Batemi
- baka *adj* female, *n* girl
- balome *adj* male, *n* men
- batana *n* warriors (sing: *mutana*)
- Batemi *n* the Sonjo/Temi people
- bondogo *n* relatedness, clanship
- bekela *v* pay the sin offering for an offence
- biiso *n* water springs (sing. *riiso*)
- biisone *n* area near the water springs
- bijoomi *n* area of more than one clan
- biryooka *n* spirits of the dead. (sing. *kiryooka*)
- biryookane *n* place of the dead ancestors, underworld
- bitana *n* type of medicine from *ghorowane* 2) magic ritual
- bughmani *n* honey, honey beer
- bugwene *n* a place of worship
- buhembe *n* sorghum (sorghum bicolor)
- bula *n* 1) intestines 2) luck, destiny
- buna baradani *n* celebration at end of initiation
- butemi *n* 1) tradition 2) ritual
- daba biiso *id* break a taboo, 'touch the springs'

ebira *v* smear, anoint, *n* ritual celebration in which the Bagwe stones are smeared with goat fat

edaba ghōrowane *id* break a taboo, ‘touch the temple’

edughania *v* to create smoke, smoke out 2) purifying ritual after the death of a person

Egwantalu *n* character in Birimo divinity

ekiro *n* witchcraft

elaline *n* informal teaching, storytelling by elders around campfire

Eludasi *n* German colonials

elya birano *id* participate in a ritual, ‘eat of the dish’

ekōrani *n* 1) advice, counsel 2) official traditional meeting

ese *n* father (example: Mariase is the father of Maria, his firstborn)

etōngō *n* 1) council of elders 2) foundation of a house

etōnya *v* transgress against Kirimo

etema *n* 1) liver 2) agriculture

ghabyeeka *n* traditional leather skirt of unmarried girls

ghajuuri *n* celebratory victory dance of *batana*

ghamba *n* powerful person with supernatural abilities

Ghambageu *n* a god, *Ghambageu*, Khambageu, Hambageu

Ghambarisoori *n* member of Temi pantheon

ghau *n* divine power

ghōrou *n* 1) festival, procession, ritual

ghōrowane *n* temple

ghēerane *n* 3 month period after a baby's birth, ‘where it smells’

Ghulubeda *n* member of Temi pantheon

ghuseri *n* village meeting place, official meeting for *benamijye*

gighōba kya gharari *n* celebration after the first rains

gighōba kya lulela *n* celebration of cutting umbilical cord

gighōba kya museera *n* *batana* cleaning the irrigation furrows

gighōba kya njoboki *n* wedding day

gighuujji *n* dance

gighuye *n* first dance at *mbarimbari* celebration

gisymba *n* Swahili language

Gitemi *n* language of the Batemi, Kisonjo, *Gitemi*

gitemi *n* twig, branch

gitemi *n* 1) liver 2) inner being

gitemi *n* 1) social behavioural code 2) history 3) language  
 Gooko *n* female member of Temi pantheon  
 hombya *v* 1) sin, commit an offense 2) miss  
 huura *n* irrigated field  
 kala siing'a *id* symbolic gesture to demand contribution for a feast, 'sit on the goat dung heap'  
 Kabaradeeda *n* member of Temi pantheon  
 kajuyyane *n* 1) place of education 2) place of condemnation  
 kibondo *n* leather storage bag (plural: *bibondo*)  
 kibonone *n* decorative metal bar worn at dances  
 kibumbuku *n* fenced off area near the Kiritone  
 kigabi *n* Maasai language  
 kihorra *n* secret oath during male initiation  
 kijori *n* boy before circumcision (plural: *bijori*)  
 kijengere *n* cowry shell  
 kijoomi *n* 1) clan, lintel 2) village gate  
 kimalakolo *n* language of the elders  
 kirembe *n* dance of older women at beginning of *mase* celebration  
 Kirimo *n* name of sacred horn (plural: Birimo)  
 Kiritone *n* dancing plaza found in each village  
 kiseejo kiseri *n* clay pot for sacred use  
 koba mbori *v* grunt, signal peculiar to *batana*  
 kobelana *v* beseech Mugwe, sing an entreaty  
 kuririba *n* final days of circumcision ceremony  
 kyasoone *n* meeting place for women  
 lambola *v* purifying ritual done by *benamijye*  
 loga *v* bewitch  
 lebardani *n* boys just circumcised but before initiation (variant: *nebaradani*)  
 lohyo *n* long knife, sword  
 lujuuru *n* cry, wail  
 lukemi *n* emergency call  
 lutala lwa nkoma *n* shelf inside the *ghorwane* where sacred stones are kept  
 maama *n* maternal uncle  
 maghandala *n* long sticks  
 maghasi *n* sacred stones kept hidden in the temple huts

masaeka *n* celebration of roofing temple huts  
 masahu *n* 1) warning call 2) armies  
 masahune *n* meeting place for warriors  
 matongo *n* meeting place outside of village territory  
 mbarimbari *n* 1) white colour, chalk 2) harvest festival  
 mbeku *n* sin offering for clan offences  
 mbererane *n* burial place  
 mbori ya huura *n* ritual cleansing of the *huura* fields  
 mbori ya magoro *n* celebration in Ebwe before cultivating the fields  
 Megato *n* name of women's age-set (born c.1960-67)  
 Mesaga *n* member of Temi pantheon  
 monto ale nsoni *n* a person with respect  
 monto ati nsoni *n* a person without respect  
 Monto Mukolo *n* the Old Man, Kirimo  
 muduli *n* ostrich plume decoration  
 mughorowane *n* traditional priest (plural: *baghorowane*)  
 Mugwe *n* God  
 muhageeri *n* 1) priest 2) sweeper  
 mukolo *n* 1) old man, elder 2) leader, king *adj* old, important  
 mukyama *n* assistant of *mwenamijye* (plural: *bakyama*)  
 mulo *n* 1) agriculture 2) digging stick  
 mulogi *n* sorcerer  
 mulongo *n* 1) part of Ebwe 2) tree (*zanthoxylum chalybeum*)  
 mulosya *n* horn blower (plural: *balosya*)  
 murong'o *n* 1) placenta 2) a close relative following a maternal lineage  
 mureera *n* tree, acacia *xanthophloe*a  
 muribita *n* intermediary between *etongo* and *bekorani*, messenger (plural: *baribita*)  
 muringa *n* beehive  
 musuuru *n* leather skirt of married women  
 mutalongi *n* announcer, prophet  
 mutana mukolage *n* older warrior (plural: *batana bakolage*)  
 mutana muriragi *n* younger warrior (plural: *batana bariragi*)  
 mute jwa bamalakolo *n* men's meeting  
 mute jwa budanda *n* security meeting  
 mute jwa etongo *n* elders' meeting

mute *n* 1) tree 2) meeting, gathering, conference  
 Mutemi *n* *Mutemi*, Sonjo person, (plural: Batemi)  
 Muturi *n* member of the blacksmith clan (plural: Baturi)  
 muuma *n* oath, curse  
 muyɔgɔ *n* 1) rumen content 2) ritual cleansing, expiation  
 mwenamijye *n* village elder, leader (plural: *benamijye*)  
 Mwɛɛri *n* 1) a god, the moon 2) a season or month  
 mwɛkɔrani *n* leader of an age-group (plural: *bɛkɔrani*)  
 mwɛkɛrya *n* 1) adult male Mutemi 2) guardian  
 nanjala jya byala *n* celebration at 6 months of first pregnancy  
 Nankone *n* female member of Temi pantheon  
 ndaghami *n* 1) blood 2) fever, malaria  
 ndoe *n* kudu horn  
 ng'ɔmbɛ jya baana *n* celebration of transition from warriorhood to elderhood  
 ng'ɔndi jya bwɛɛlɔ *n* ritual to cleanse pasturelands after *gitemi* has been transgressed  
 ng'ɔndi ya moi *n* ritual to remove curse after blood has been spilled in a field  
 ng'ɔndi ya mubale *n* ritual to remove widespread sickness or appearances of spirits  
 ng'ina *n* mother  
 ng'adaba *n* sin  
 ngaroyyi *n* men's wood/fur ornament worn on arm  
 ngisagara *n* uncircumcised boy  
 ngobi *n* 1) leather cape 2) any clothing  
 njaghamba *n* 1) male animal 2) lord  
 nkɔlɔ *n* 1) heart 2) human spirit, inner being  
 nsɔni *n*, honour, respect  
 nsombi *n* 1) ritual headdress 2) name of the two leading age-sets  
 nsunya *n* goat fat used in rituals  
 ntemi *n* scars on chest and back of a person  
 olbuli *n* camp of the batana (alternate: *elubuli*)  
 ririba *v* 1) accomplish circumcision ceremony 2) to shake up  
 Ryoba *n* the sun, a god  
 sega mai *id* explain, interpret, divine 'hit the water'  
 segɛera mai *id* command given during *mase* to 'spread the water'  
 sedani *n* 1) contribution to a traditional celebration 2) large clay honey pot  
 singirya *n* age-set (plural: *masingirya*)



sonjo *n* lablab bean (Lablab purpureus)

soora ndaghuyya *id* boys wanting to be initiated, 'look for the knife'

tuma ngobi *id* 1) initiation instructions 2) reconciliation process, 'to sew a leather cape'

## 10.2 Short Biographies of Contributors

### 10.2.1 Adam Joachim Gimirey, Mugholo

In 1979, Adam was born into the family of Joachim and Maria, the first of six siblings. He grew up in Mugholo, a village lying adjacent to Digodigo. His father was a school teacher, and enabled his son to finish Form 4 secondary school. Adam's father is now retired and owns a small shop in Mugholo. Once Adam returned from his secondary school in Tanga on the Tanzanian coast, he joined the FPCT (Free Pentecostal Church of Tanzania) congregation in Digodigo. In 2005 he married Upendo, the pastor's oldest daughter. Their three children, Abigaeli (2006), Rafael (2008), and Gabriel (2009) were born thereafter.

Adam grew up and was initiated as one of the younger members into the Origibali age-set. However, because he had been away at school during the time that the others celebrated *mase*, his own initiation took place after the main ceremony, and encompassed a handful of others who had also been delayed.

Adam started working with SIL in 2004, describing cultural topics such as marriage, age-set concerns, celebrations, initiation and *mase*. He became employed as the SIL office assistant, and attended a number of courses held in Tanzania and Kenya: computer skills, translation principles workshop, writer's workshop, conference for anthropology consultants (accompanying Klaus). During the time that his father-in-law, Albert Masando, was the primary translator of biblical booklets and literacy materials, Adam worked chiefly on data entry and as an assistant. However, in 2006, when Masando left the project, Adam became the primary translator, working with the growing team, entering data, learning new computer programs, and transcribing interviews.

In 2012 project funding was cut, thereby ending his employment with SIL. He found work in Penyinyi, and afterwards returned to Mugholo to farm his own land. In Digodigo he opened a shop in which he does photocopying and basic computer services like typing letters or sending emails.

### 10.2.2 Albert Kaneya Sinoni, Ebwe

Albert Kaneya was born in 1965 in Digodigo. He went to school as a child, and finished seventh grade. Although he would have liked to continue his education, at that time his father was opposed to any further education, saying that Albert was needed to tend goats and farm the land.

As a young man he joined the Evangelical Assemblies of God in Tanzania (EAGT). Subsequently he attended a Bible college in Dodoma, where he was ordained as a pastor. He got married in 1988, and has five children, the oldest of whom tragically died in an accident this year. Albert worked as the pastor of an EAGT church in Digodigo. He began trekking up the mountain to start Bible studies in Tinaga, despite general opposition. In 2000 he was beaten up by some of the *batana* whom he guessed had been told to threaten him. Afterwards (c. 2005) he moved with his family to Tinaga in order to start a small congregation there, the only Christian gathering in the entire village.

Around 2001, there were armed conflicts between the Loita Maasai and the Batemi. One of the areas with contested land was Tinaga, and the *batana* there joined together to set up rigorous patrols of the village. Albert armed himself and joined the *batana* in their battle plans. To keep them safe, he sent his family back to Digodigo for a time. Albert received flak from his ecclesiastical supervisors as well as from other Christians concerning this decision to fight. Nevertheless, he felt that the obligation to defend one's home territory was vital, and not to be considered a sin.

He travels between Tinaga and Digodigo about twice a week, taking a 3 hour hike on a steep mountain path between his current home in Tinaga and his own land in Digodigo, where he started building a temporary structure for church meetings.

During the time that we were first learning Gitemi, he was an invaluable and enthusiastic assistant, especially in gathering proverbs and oral histories. He has an excellent memory for interesting incidents, even those which he had only heard about during his childhood. He worked for a number of years with a team of two other translators, translating portions of the Bible as well as other reading materials into Gitemi.

### 10.2.3 Stephen Gaigi Kadalida, Ebwe

Taken from an interview:

My name is Stephen Gaigi Kadalida, and was I born in Digodigo. My father was also born here, but my mother was born in Mugholo. I was born in 1972. In my life, I have done various kinds of work. Starting in 1986, I became the leader of our age-set, while we were still *bijɔɔri* (uninitiated youths). I continued with the leadership of the age-set until we were initiated in 1995, and I have continued to be in leadership to this day, in 2014. I am in the church, that is, I am a believer in the Catholic Church. I used to be the catechist. I led the church for about five years. I left that position because my own work increased, and because another catechist came.

So personally I have tried to help in various positions of leadership within this village. The people have recognized my ability to lead within the age-set, and if a problem occurs, they come to me first, or second, for help because they respect me and recognize me as a leader. But afterwards our brothers from SIL came, those who do research and translate the Bible into Gitemi. I worked together with them, with Baba Joshua, who is Klaus, and his wife Mama Joshua. We work together well until this day. I have no difficulties with them, and if there are small problems, it is just the normal human ones. We were able to talk and come to a solution for any problems...

KD: Tell about your schooling...

SG: One could say that I have not been to school. I started school in 1983 at the primary school in Digodigo. But I only did four years well, first through fifth grade. Starting in sixth grade, I began missing classes. I would drop out, then continue, then drop out again, so that I finally finished in 1988. But I did not finish well. I did not even get the seventh grade certificate because I did not work at it. So my education is about seventh grade, but I did not finish well.

But when I worked with SIL, I went to several different courses. They brought me to Morogoro for a translation course, and they took good care of me. When I was working with the Catholic Church, they sent me to school. I took the course on the catechist, in the Engika parish in Arusha. The place is called Oldonyo Sambu. That was for three years. I worked hard and succeeded there. That is my education where I succeeded. Even in the village I have been a ward chairman starting in 2005 and going on for three years ...

KD: What about your family?

SG: I married. Her name is Hosia Stephen. I came from Kadalida clan, and she is from the Barusobian clan. I married in 2003. We started having children in 2004. I have five children...

My first child is Gaigi, born in 2004, the second is Pamela... In our lives, my wife and I have not encountered any problems of fighting one another. You know that a wife and her husband are like dishes in a washbasin; they can't stop banging against one another! But we do not have any larger disagreements where we fight one another. We live well together. Our children live well. It is only one child that has a problem, Pamela, because she faints occasionally, but God helps her even though the sickness continues. That is my life.

KD: What about your life in the clan?

SG: In the Kadalida clan, in 2012, we sat together to discuss how we can fight poverty among us. Not everyone has means. They decided to found an organization (CBO) which is about farming. This is about buying farm products and selling them. I, Stephen Gaigi, am the vice chairman of this organization. We work well, and no one in the organization has shown mistrust of me. I lead them well. As it is in the leadership, we have five people; the chairman is...

Our organization is doing well because we bought a tractor for 42 million (TZS), and in the bank account we have almost 10 million. We continue to get some profit from renting out the tractor, and from other plans. Another project we had was...

KD: Can you explain about the time you left the area, and the reason why you quit going to school?

SG: I left here for Kenya in 1988. The reason I left school to go to Kenya is that age-mates had already done the same in 1987 and onwards. When they came back they wore really nice *shukas* (togas) and I was enticed. So I left school, but my parents wanted me to continue because I was smart. From first through third grade, I was in first place in my class. After that I sank to third or fourth place, and then I dropped out. I went to Kenya that year, in 1988, to Shombole, where I stayed for three months. I fetched water and gathered firewood. Our employers were Somalis, who paid us 20 or 30 shillings. The one with the highest salary got 50. I was getting 30 for a month. What a lot of work; you fetch water, you bring firewood, you cook. Afterwards they refused to pay my salary, so I left Shombole to go to Olaiga. I stayed there for six months, and did not have any problems. The work was the same; going for firewood, water, cooking. Then my age-mates came and told me they are going to Kiseryan with the expectation of getting around 100-200 Kenya shillings. So I was enticed, and left Olaika. When we

got to Magadi, I did not continue on the journey. I stayed there. Even in Magadi I stayed six months. But my work there was raising a child of a factory worker. He went to the factory in the morning, and I stayed with the child. I washed him ...

KD: A Mutemi?

SG: No, a Kalenjin. I washed the child, cooked for him, washed all his clothes, for six months. But he was difficult. It was hard work for that salary. It was 60 Kenya shillings. So I stayed, then some Maasai were looking for someone to shepherd for them. He took me to Singraine, in Kajiado. He gave me work as a shepherd, and I stayed there for three years. My salary was 150 Kenya shillings.

KD: You learned the Maasai language?

SG: Yes, I really learned it and know it to this day. Afterwards I went to Kajiado town. I met a woman who was selling fruits and vegetables at the market. She hired me to cook and fetch water. I did not do it for long. We went to church together, to the Catholic Church. I lived there with that woman for three months. Afterwards a Tanzanian padre took me in, he was called Father Munishe. When we worshipped there, it became evident that he really liked me. He enticed me to enter as a catechist. In Kenya is where I became a catechist. He called me there, he convinced me to become a catechist. He brought me to a course in ... There is a large church built there, and I went to lead the services. While I was in Isinya, he brought me to a centre in Ngong to a one month course. I got used to the work. When I returned to Kajiado, there was an *mzungu* (foreign) padre called Gerald. He said a person can request to do work at their home place. So I asked to return to Tanzania. When I came back, I encountered the padre Lamek, the Maasai. We continued together. He stopped being a padre, and then he died. I kept working with other padres. But when my activities got to be too much, I stopped being a catechist.

KD: So you lived in Loliondo (market town near Butemine) for a while?

SG: Yes, for a long time. And I lived with Lamek for a long time. You know, he was really a rascal. But even in his rascally activities we did not have any conflicts. We understood each other very well. Lamek was older than me, but when I lived with him I did not have any problems ...1

#### 10.2.4 Alfayo Gudodo, Raghari

Alfayo Gudodo is a member of the Erumagero age-set from Raghari. He was born into a priestly clan and grew up learning about the practices and beliefs of the *ghorowane*, before he became a Christian and joined the Free Pentecostal Church of Tanzania. Today, Alfayo is the supervising elder of their church community in Raghari. He has a family with five children. Alfayo is almost blind, and can hardly read the Bible. However, his extraordinary memory allows him to quote long passages accurately. Alfayo is also a gifted singer and has composed numerous poetic Christian songs which continue to be used in and outside the church.

#### 10.2.5 Salia Ngadia Nambololo, Ebwe

Salia Ngadia, the head of the Ebwe village council, belongs to the Nambololo clan of the Bisone moiety. In Gitemi, a man is known by the name of his firstborn child. The suffix *-se* denotes ‘father’. Therefore, Salia Ngadia is known as Diniase, his oldest son being named Dinia.

Diniase’s father Ngadia was also the head of the *benamijye* before him, and is remembered as a powerful and able leader. Ngadia’s granddaughter remembers that he was the one who had given the land on which the Ebwe medical clinic stands. She also recounts how her grandfather had worked together with the British colonists, receiving sugar and an iron teapot as gifts from them.

Diniase is married to Disiai (Ng’ina Dinia) who came from the Kasone clan. The two of them have enjoyed a long marriage and have five children, all of whom have their own families. Diniase himself is well-loved by the villagers for his generous and wise personality. Unlike other elders who persist on the strict execution of the customary law – even if it means lethal retribution toward one’s own kin – Diniase is trying to find alternative conflict solutions and avoid harsh punishment. This exceptionally mild-mannered disposition may have something to do with the fact that three of his own children have partially removed themselves from the adherence to *gitemi* practices through their affiliation with local churches; two with Pentecostal denominations, and one with the Catholic Church.

Diniase belongs to the Erumarere age-set who were initiated in 1952.<sup>95</sup> Most probably he was one of the younger members to be initiated, having been born around

1940. Within the *etongo* group there are a few men who are one age-set above, and one or two elders who have been initiated two cycles earlier than himself. The Nambololo clan from which Diniase springs is said to be one of the clans that came as ‘strangers’ and were adopted into the Bisone moiety later than others.<sup>96</sup>

Diniase’s oldest son Dinia left home as a teenager (after he was initiated) to search for work in Kenya. For many years he lived with his Gikuyu wife (in a second marriage) and his three children in Kajiado, Kenya, where he works in a butchery. Dinia has visited his parents occasionally over the last decade, and once tried to settle back in Ebwe, but was not able to reintegrate into society. Diniase’s and other elders’ expectations to follow in his father’s footsteps – that is, to participate in traditional ceremonies and observe other *gitemi* customs – put a lot of pressure on Dinia. He felt embarrassed to submit to this strict learning regime while being well into his 40s. Nevertheless, his father was determined to have his oldest son back in Ebwe: ‘I will teach him everything he needs to know in order to do the work of a *mwenamijye*.’<sup>97</sup> I have met up with Dinia when he was living in Ebwe and noticed how uncomfortable he looked during a ritual procession, wearing a goat skin and trying to figure out what his part in the ritual was. He always returned to Kenya after a period of time in Ebwe. His father keeps pleading with him to come back and has even visited him a few times in Kajiado, but so far without success. If Dinia indeed does not return to take his father’s place, the position will eventually be filled by another suitable man from the same clan lineage.

Diniase is not a man of many words. Interviews with him were often unpredictable as to their outcome. Depending on his mood, he either complied to answer questions, or he harangued his disapproval loudly. Despite his short-temperedness when it came to address Temi culture, we shared a friendship which was expressed through mutual gifts and in the enjoyment of each other’s company which was unencumbered by the suspicion of one taking advantage of the other. Over the years, the relationship with Diniase and his family has thus become one of the cherished gifts with which we were rewarded during our years in Ebwe.



### 10.2.6 Masando Sediyya Gadiyyo, Ebwe

Masando Sediyya belongs to the oldest age-set (Erumayadi) of which only a few members are still alive in Ebwe. The initiation rite of the Erumayadi age-set took place around 1940. Masando has five children two of whom are living with their families in Ebwe. His wife died a couple of years ago. Two sons joined Pentecostal churches; one is a pastor in Ebwe. Today, Masando lives in his own house near the dancing plaza at the centre of the *kaaya* and looks after the family goats. His grandchildren take turn in providing him with food and water. He was pointed out to me as a man with exceptional memory for the history of the Batemi, as well as an able narrator of Temi myths. His narrations are very poetic and filled with the subtle humour and gentleness of old age.

### 10.2.7 MF, Ebwe

MF belongs to the women's Megato-Silaha age-set, which puts her birth date between 1959 and 1963. She was married around 1989 and has about six children, the oldest being a boy (born c.1990), followed by a daughter S (b.1993), and several younger children. MF spent her childhood listening to the stories her grandmother told. She has an extraordinarily retentive memory, and a vivid story-telling style. For several years she did not want to communicate with us, and was brought, almost forcibly, by some other women who thought she should have her stories recorded. She walked away in sudden anger during a few of these first encounters. Afterwards, as the relationship grew, she began inviting Christine to her home to visit and to take photographs of her daughter at the post-circumcision celebration.

MF is suspicious of going to the local clinic for any medical needs. In 2011 she practiced a ritual in order to heal S of scales which she said had been caused by an evil eye. S had let her hair grow out long, and another girl had commented on its beauty. The following day S was shaken with fever, her hair fell out, and her head became covered in scales. She looked quite ill. MF turned down an offer of payment for medical care at the clinic for her daughter. Instead, she went into the wilderness to gather tortoise bones, which she placed in a fire. The girl had to sit with a cloth over her head and inhale the smoke, so that 'the tortoise would enter her, and the evil spirit depart.'

In June 2009 there was an incident at the *mbarimbari* festival in which the *batana* sang an insulting song about their mothers. The women were all livid, but especially the Megato-Silaha age-set, whose sons were the instigators. The women went to the village elders as an assembled group and complained, threatening to desert the village, and using strong oaths. MF, in recounting the incident, was made almost speechless with rage, slapping her *musuuru* (leather skirt) and re-enacting the oaths. Her forceful personality amuses, but also motivates her age-mates to join her. Although several of her age-mates and friends attend churches, MF is strongly opposed to the church. She hears that the churches do not condone female circumcision, which she declares is absolutely necessary for a girl to become an adult woman. That, she says, is one of the traditions that must continue forever among the Batemi.

#### 10.2.8 MR, Ebwe

MR was born around 1966, the second child of a village elder in Digodigo. She spent part of her youth living with her maternal grandmother, who encouraged her to drop out of school early, perhaps in third grade. She recounts an episode where she ran away from home, threatening to go to Kenya and never come back. MR spent the rest of her youth herding goats and taking care of her three younger siblings,

As a twelve year old, she was one of the younger girls to be circumcised, perhaps in 1978. She remembers looking at the older teenagers, who were busy doing decorative scarring, and wanting to imitate, and out-do, them. Her whole abdomen has decorative cuts, made by hooking the skin and smearing soot into the wounds. Her face, too, is cut, the eyebrows are deep black curving scars over her eyes. In these childhood episodes one sees a strong personality emerging.

As a teenager, in 1984, a Christian friend spoke to her about the secret involved in the blowing of the Kirimo horn. Up until that time, she had believed that the blowing of the horn was the sound of God's voice. This friend convinced her to hide in the evening, just as the *mase* festival was beginning. The two girls saw how the *batana* were carrying two horns to different locations, so that when they were blown, alternately, it gave the impression that the sound was moving from one place to another. She said, 'When I realized that I was tricked, I knew it was not God anymore.'

When she was around 20, she was given in marriage, a marriage that had been arranged by her parents. Both sets of parents were friends, so all had been planned when

the two of them were still children. In 1987, her oldest son was born, followed by numerous children born over the next 18 years.

Around 1994, her husband married another woman, and in 2000 they combined households, so that both women lived, in separate huts, on their husband's land. This communal living occurred with some tension, but for the most part the co-wives got along- each having her own relatives and set of friends to depend on for help in farming. One of the few activities we saw them engage in together was when they moved the whole compound onto a plot of land a little less remote than where they had originally lived. There they helped to plaster one another's huts. The younger co-wife belongs to a different age-set, and is MR's junior by ten or more years.

In 2000, when we met MR, she was violently opposed to Christians, perhaps because her younger brother and sister both belonged to a Pentecostal church. She complained that Christians destroy the culture by refusing to participate in communal activities, such as clearing irrigation ditches, or caring for their relatives.

As my wife's relationship with her has grown over the past 13 years, she has spoken freely, and humorously, of many things; feelings about gender, faith, children, and the importance of her culture. For the last several years she has attended the Catholic Church regularly, and is sometimes accompanied by her husband. MR's daughter was married in 2011, and had her first child the following year. The daughter and her husband live in Dar es Salaam, over 1000km away. MR talked to her daughter on the phone, and spent a year planning a visit to see her first grandchild. She had never been further away from home than the 2 hour drive to the market town Wasso. Finally, she was able to make the trip, seeing the ocean, skyscrapers, paved roads, and her granddaughter for the first time.

Christine remembers when MR's daughter was around 10 years old. They were all lounging in the sleepy compound, whittling away an hour in the shade. The girl was awkwardly juggling little yellow inedible fruits, tossing them up in the air. MR playfully grabbed them, and started juggling expertly. The memory of many hours and days herding goats sent her into a reverie, and she returned the fruits with a satisfied grin.

### 10.2.9 MW, Ebwe

MW was born around 1962, and is one of the older women of her age-set, the Megato-Silaha. She went to primary school, but not beyond. When she was around 20, she was given in marriage, and the couple became parents to a girl in 1985. Their daughter, now a young woman, looks strikingly like her mother; broad cheekbones, small ears, slim figure. Their second daughter, G, was born around 1987, followed by other children, the last of whom was born in 2006.

In 2000, when MW first saw our family, she noticed our oldest son Joshua climbing a papaya tree. She called out to him, to his confusion, ‘Nebele!’ which is the name of a goddess through whom the first white people were born on earth.

In 2003, my wife Christine made a visit of several days at her boma, where MW took care of her husband’s cattle. Though her home in the village is cleaner than any other home seen among the Batemi, the *boma* (homestead) was crawling with flies. They ate their porridge, and drank the boiled milk, flicking out the flies that died in the hot food. ‘Do not worry’ she said, ‘those flies are clean, not like city flies.’

In the previous year, we had done a community water project, which necessitated going into the sacred springs in order to tap the water source. She believed in Kirimo, the sound of the horn as the voice of God, until that time. When she saw the springs, as she thought, desecrated, she expected that Kirimo would no longer visit the Batemi with his voice. A few months later, the horn sounded as usual at the *mase* festival. At that time, she realized that the horn could not be God’s voice.

She began going regularly to the Catholic Church, attending any seminars they offered. In 2011, she convinced her husband to attend a marriage seminar, and along with many other long-married couples, reaffirmed her marriage in church.

Her friends include MR, MF, and other women who all grew up together and live near one another. As a group, they are the ones who introduced Christine to the age-set, and consistently invited her to weddings and women’s meetings. There is a sense among all the women of the Megato that all the children belong to all the mothers. Whenever one of them has a daughter marrying, the others sing at the bride-price celebration, ‘Our child has gotten a man ...’

Last year, her daughter G died suddenly in Dar es Salaam of an epileptic seizure. The girl had been named after her paternal grandmother, and from childhood on, the grandmother had appeared to her, threatening to come pull her into the spirit world. As a young adult, G had undergone an exorcism, where the grandmother’s spirit spoke

through her body to the assembled crowd, demanding to have the life of the girl. MW recounted G's story sadly, 'I could not eat, and wasted away until I was no more than a stick. Her father wanted to commit suicide, because he was the one who had named her.' MW's conclusion: 'I will see my daughter again. I do not know why she was taken, but I am thankful for the children who are alive.'

The Batemi and Maasai are often contrasted to one another by outsiders. The Maasai are scripted as the romantic pastoralists with a strong sense of beauty and harmony with nature. The Batemi, on the other hand, are considered stubborn farmers and fierce warriors without an appreciation for the picturesque. MW, with her calm grace, refutes this image. She once said, 'I woke up early this morning, around 5 o'clock. All the stars were out, with Lagira the morning star, and it was so beautiful. I walked to the Sumine pasture lands. Surely, God shows his goodness in the morning. It is all so fresh and good.'

### **10.3 Temi Myths and Oral Histories**

#### **10.3.1 The Beginning of Tobacco<sup>52</sup>**

I am telling you the story of the first person to use tobacco. This is how tobacco came to be used in Butemine.

It started like this: a man had a small plot of sweet potatoes. He went there to hoe his sweet potatoes and saw that a porcupine had been rooting in his field. So he decided to sit and guard his field himself. He sat and sat, but the porcupine kept sneaking in. Finally, he thought he would go to his best friend's house to borrow his spear. So he took the spear and returned to his field to guard it.

There it came, the porcupine lumbering into his field. He ran after it, threw the spear, and pierced it through. The porcupine, with the spear still stuck in its back, ducked into a tunnel, where it disappeared, spear and all.

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<sup>52</sup> Rec: Peter Dudui 2 Feb 2002, Soyeta

The young man went to tell his friend, 'I have lost your spear.' The friend answered energetically, 'What! You have lost my spear? But this is the very spear I like, and I want you to get it back for me!'

'But where should I look for it, since it is nowhere to be seen?'

'Look for the place where you hit the porcupine, and when you find the tunnel it slipped into, go in there yourself.' So the young man left. He had no choice but to do as his friend had demanded. Now the porcupine has slipped into a tunnel, and at that very place the young man ducked down. In he went. As soon as he had gone just a little ways, he saw a gate. When he reached the gate, he saw a person there from his clan. The man was wounded, as if he had been pierced by a spear.

'Have you come here?' he asked the young man.

'Yes, I am looking for my friend's spear because he demanded it of me. He had said, "Look for it until you find my spear!"'

The wounded man asked, 'Is that what he told you?'

'Yes'

'Well come on, it is time to return. This is his spear. And take this tobacco to him. Tell him to sniff it. Take what I am giving you. If I give this to you, afterwards tell him to follow you to find this place where the tobacco comes from. I am telling you, when you see this tunnel, enter in.'

The young man left. The tobacco he had been given was already ground to powder. When he arrived he said, 'Friend! Take your little spear.' He returned it to him, his little spear. Then he gave him the tobacco, the tobacco which had come from the world of the spirits. This was because the people who had gone there had changed into spirits, the people of our clan.

So he gave him the tobacco. When his friend had finished it, he said to the young man, 'Now then, my friend. Come let us do this one thing. Did you notice how you sneeze, and your whole head is filled with satisfaction? What I want is my own tobacco, and only you know where it comes from.'

The young man found that he did not have a choice. He had to follow the tracks back to get the tobacco for his friend. He had, after all, been the one who first demanded the spear of him. The young man entered the tunnel, and as he did so, he saw the people of his clan who had become spirits. He was told, 'Come here. Did you try the tobacco?'

'Yes'

‘Here, bring this to your friend. And now, we have added something. We are even going to give you tobacco seeds. This will conclude the matter; sow the seeds, sow the seeds.’ That is how it happened; he brought his friend the tobacco as well as the seeds.

‘Friend, listen. I have been given the seeds, so let us plant them.’ They planted the seeds, and they grew. That is how tobacco came to be on the earth. It now belongs to all people. Up to this very day it is sniffed. There is also the chewing tobacco. And nowadays there is the kind you twist up. People roll a cigarette and smoke comes out. They inhale it. That was the beginning of tobacco coming to earth. And this tobacco cannot be refused to any person because it comes from the world of spirits. How could you refuse to share tobacco with your friend?

This is how it began and now I am done.

### 10.3.2 How the Batemi and the Baturi Split Up<sup>53</sup>

This is what separates us from the Batemi; it is those songs of theirs at *mase*. We did this one thing; we refused to pass by Mwegato. We refused. When we refused to pass Mwegato, Ghambageu refused, and he was the one who prevented us. He refused and we found that we too wanted to leave it. It seemed childish to us.

The Batemi passed by Mwegaro, they went until Ndatyane. When they settled in Ndatyane, their inheritance was given to them, their horn. They said that they had been given an inheritance for singing. The songs they sang at that time are the same that they sing nowadays at *mase*. We refused, though. They said that we would be brought to Kirimo; we would go and be finished off.

Have you ever seen a person who died, and on the next day he gets up? Have you seen it? Have you ever seen it? Now why does a person die, and afterwards they look for him in the wilderness? Is he looked for when he is dead? Is it possible? To get up again, is it possible? Now this lie is what we despised. We won’t sing *mase*. That is where we separate. One became a Muturi; the other became a Mutemi.

We were even prevented from having farmland. We hated this matter, and we refused to follow this matter of blowing the horn of the Batemi. Since when does God speak with a horn? They sing *mase* and we refuse. That is where we separate. They sing *mase* and are brought to Kirimo, but that is not for us - no!

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<sup>53</sup> Rec: Kasembeyani 21 Feb 2002, Tinaga

That is how it is.

### **10.3.3 How the Batemi Came to be Here<sup>54</sup>**

At our homestead I was born as an only child, but my grandfather was very rich. All the people used to go to the older men. They asked to hear stories from long ago, asking where the Batemi came from. They say the Batemi come from the East. They came to a place called Masing'ane. It is an old village, Masing'ane. They left Masing'ane and came to Mageri.

When they were in Mageri, the god scattered them. He sent safari ants on them, lots of red insects. The people were in their fields, and others were in the village. They came until even the houses of the people were spread flat. That is how they overran the place. So the people in the fields were afraid of going home. When they looked at the houses, they saw that it was worse than in the fields. And those in the houses were afraid of going to the fields. People all dispersed because they were afraid.

Then came the birds of prey. The starlings came, the ones that hover over a ploughed field, the ploughed and watered fields where the women farm. The birds came and picked out the eyes of people, both eyes. They picked them out as if they were eating small ants. So this is what happened. The people dispersed. Two people went until they came to Meru Kilimanjaro. They found water so they settled close to the water. They fed themselves from trash, just grubs in the water. Now Ghambageu rose up until he found them there.

He said, 'Men, what are you doing here?'

They said, 'We live here.'

'What do you eat?'

They said, 'We survive off this trash here.'

He dug for them and planted a banana stalk. He told them, 'Stay here by this banana stalk. When it produces fruit, then eat the fruit.' That is why the Meru people have many bananas. Then he passed that area and came to where he found the people scattered. He came upon a couple of people unexpectedly. In another place there were

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<sup>54</sup> Rec: Mbande Barasayedi 17 May 2002, Ebwe



three. The people started to see who was left after the birds and the safari ants. They came to see that there was only a small group, so they went to live together in a place called Madari ja Nkaya, the Lion's pool. The Lion's pool is in Egaghune, that is, near Hajaro. That is, you go by Egaghune to descend the path to Penyinyi.

They lived there and dug onion-like tubers. That is what they ate. In the end they came to the plains of Eroghata to live there. They began to spread out. You met two of them here; one person there, three people over there. That is how they lived. In the end one woman rose up, she came here to this mountain where she saw the spring, all moist inside. She said, 'This dark place here has water.' She went further until she found the water. So she lived there all by herself. She lived there for a while. One day a man came and found her there. He asked, 'Mama, where do you live?'

She answered, 'I live here.' From that little bit of water she was drinking.

'Let us live together.'

'Fine'

They lived together and they had a boy child. The man thought to himself, 'If this boy grows up, this water that belongs to the woman will go to her child. He will inherit.' So he decided to kill his child. So he killed his boy child. Hey! He brought him to death. After a while the woman bore another boy. That boy was very small. He was born early. The man told the woman, 'Go and look for firewood and bring it.' He grabbed the boy and strangled him. When the woman returned she was told, 'Oh, the child, he's dead.'

'He's dead?'

'Yes'

'What killed him?'

'I do not know. I did not see him until he was frothing at the mouth. Then he died.'

Then she hid her sorrow. She bore another child, and this time a girl. The girl grew up. Then she had another boy. The man was sitting. When he got to a certain place, he told his wife to do a certain activity. 'Go there and do this-and-that.' So then he strangled that boy, another one. After he had strangled the second time she had another child a boy. The child lived.

The woman went to look for her people that were with her in the place she left. She told them, 'I have borne children who are boys and those who are girls. I bear a boy, and he dies. I bear a boy, and he dies.' The woman said, 'That husband indeed is

the one who is strangling my children. Please come and hide yourselves. See for yourselves if it is true that he is strangling the children.'

So they came, and were told, 'Hide yourselves here, to see if this child will have the same thing done to him.' The woman told them, 'Tomorrow I will tell him that he should stay with the child while I go off. You will watch him to see if he strangles the child.'

As soon as the woman was gone, the man grabbed the child to strangle him. But those people were close by, those who had hidden themselves, who had been brought. They tried to grab him, and chased him. He was afraid because the child had not died. They chased him and he went to hide himself. He was seen where he had come from. He returned to the people from where he had departed. When he got to where he had come from, the men from the woman's side arrived also.

'Hey you, why are you strangling your children?'

He said, 'I did not strangle them.'

'Leave it, it is you who is strangling them. That girl is growing. She is here and she refuses to die. You have been seen strangling. So what is your reason for strangling them?'

He said, 'When those children are grown, they will refuse to give me that small bit of water, that water coming out of a rock. I want that water.'

'Woman, do you understand why the man strangled the children?'

'Yes' Then she said, 'Let us understand each other.' They were told, 'Come, let us divide up the water, since you are relatives.' But the woman insisted, 'Just let that man stop strangling the children.'

The group of relatives said to the man, 'You will not receive more help than that! Come on, let us settle this. You stop strangling the children. Hey man, when you came, the woman already had the water. Now go to the river and stay by the fields there. And you, woman, go inside the dense brush until you come to the very beginning of the water.'

They said, 'Fine'. They agreed. The boy grew, and he was not strangled. They lived and lived, and came to make small irrigation ditches which reached to Gisyome's place, where Gisyome's father is below the springs. They farmed these small plots, then they looked for seed, because all they had was finger millet. It ripened and they ate. People learned to grow crops, and they built houses there. They spread out, and many people came, so that they became a large group. They built there. They lived there, amongst the hills. They founded villages. Others came to live there, so people spread

out. The Mbabirahene came to live in Mkahura there by the *kibigo* tree. Have you seen it? Gibusi lived there. That is the beginning. We were children. There are the *minyiri* trees and the *migenkerya* bushes, thorns and deserted homesteads there. We have seen these old homesteads when we were young. And the Babirahene came to that place. You can see it now, it is by the river. The border was by the river. There was the border for the Babirahene. You hear?

Then came the Babise, from Ritohose's clan. They came from Buri, an area of Samunge. A small group came here, they came to fill up our land. Babise and his group said, 'Let us divide up the ground.' They were given this water here, this field that you see of Babise's, all the water is from the spring. There is the woman's water and the man's. The upper water is the woman's, the lower is the man's, flowing into the river. Here they opened the Lukindo water channel. The water from the left was directed there into the flat area. That water was brought by Masyahise (a government official who lived next to Rimbani) and reached the goat path at Mlogonine (below Zawadise). All those fields got water from one source. All that land belonged to the Babirahene, and they still have those fields. They used that water to water their small fields. The people of Ebwe allowed them only a little water, but then they agreed to give that clan enough for their fields.

This is how I have heard the history that the old men told. Now the history has become large and long. It is very long, and I am adding the matters that are current inside the Butemine area. But I started to tell where the Batemi started from, and how they spread out.

Well, that is all.

#### **10.3.4 How the Baturi Came to be Here<sup>55</sup>**

We came from Masaba. We came from Masaba in the direction of Ngurume. We passed through Mageri, the one up north, and came to enter the area of Masaba. A man had a wife, and their boy. The man was killed by the people called *mwana ngho*. When he was killed, the wife and child remained. They met Ghambageu, and he brought them.

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<sup>55</sup> Rec: Kasembeyani 21 Feb 2002, Tinaga

Now Ghambageu had disguised himself as a crow. He found the mother and child starving; all they had to eat were bones. They cooked bare bones. The bones were chewed bare and there was not a thing on them. They would cook a soup from the bones and then get up to drink water. They were given the leg of a wildebeest. Ghambageu said to them, 'Take this meat and cook it. When you are done with it, toss the bones ahead of you in the direction you are wandering.' When they had thrown the bone, the crow would fly ahead to the place and alight in a tree. When they threw it, it would fall ahead, and they got up to follow it. They carried a gourd of water. When they arrived at the place, they discovered that the bone was filled with meat again. They did this over and over. Each time they found meat. They travelled this way every day, in the evening reaching the places where they slept. They slept in the shade of the tree, and the crow slept above them in the branches. Each day it was the same, until they came to Tinaga. It is our sister, Naguri. So Ghambageu said to her, 'Now then, come do this one thing. Stay here. I am going back to the faraway place where I came from, but I will come again. Wait for that day.' So he got up, he went, and returned. When he returned to Tinaga, he met people there in Tinaga where water gushes up from the spring. When he came, a man met Ghambageu there. The man said to Ghambageu,

'Hey!'

'Yes'

'Have you come?'

'Yes'

'So what should we do?'

'Get up.'

'Fine'

Ghambageu: 'Call the elders' meeting. Tell the elders to come to the village meeting place.' So that man called together the elders. And they followed him.

'Men'

'Yes'

'I have received a guest who needs to be taken care of, a man from far away. I have received a guest, but what is he going to eat? Let us count out an offering.' The village elders, the *benamijye*, were surprised, 'We should take up an offering? Now then, we know Jila, but none of us knows the name Bughandalyari, not one of us.'

'Fine,' said the man, 'so none of you knows him?'

They all got up and left the man alone there. When he saw that he was alone, he went to talk to his visitor, 'Friend, the *benamijye* have refused.'

‘That is right.’

‘The elders have refused to look for some food.’

‘Yes’

‘So let us go to my home.’ They went to his home and entered. The man called his son because he had no wife. ‘We have been visited by your father from far away, but what will he eat?’ So they grabbed a large female goat to slaughter it for the visitor. All the man had left was one goat and its kid. ‘Let us grab it and slaughter it.’ Ghambageu said, ‘Friend, do not slaughter the goat but slaughter the kid that resembles its mother.’ As they were slaughtering the goat, it grew larger and larger. It grew so large that it was the size of a calf. Ghambageu told them, ‘Now divide up the meat.’ They did so. The man said to his son, ‘Do we not even have any water?’

Ghambageu: ‘Is there not any water?’

‘That is right.’

‘Not any to cook this meat in?’

‘That is right.’

He said, ‘Bring me a gourd right away.’ So the boy went to get a gourd and brought it to his father. Ghambageu lifted up the middle pillar of the house, and water flowed out. The boy held the gourd into the water and filled it. Then he returned the pillar to its place, *Subu!* The Batemi were astounded. The pillar stayed that way. Ghambageu said, ‘Prepare a piece of the back and the liver. I have a sister who lives here.’

The boy was told, ‘Get up and go this way and say, ‘Mother’.

The boy, as he was coming back, said, ‘Why does she not agree?’

He was told by Ghambageu, ‘Get up and say “Nadugana, Nadugana, Naguri!”’

Nadugana: ‘Well, what is it?’

The boy: ‘Well, come here.’

‘Yes’

‘Come to our place, a visitor wants to see you.’

Nadugana: ‘Go tell him this; I am blind. I do not see anything.’

Ghambageu to the boy: ‘Get up and take her arm until you have brought her here.’

So the boy went to bring her. He brought her to the door. When he brought her to the door, Ghambageu said to her:

‘Nagoko, do you know who I am?’

‘No’

‘Will you know the person who saved you from the *mwana ngho* (people)?’ She ran to embrace him. She was swatted with a gnu-tail whisk across the eyes. *Kwææ!* Her eyes saw. She got up and returned. She went to tell her child, ‘Come and see our uncle who rescued us from the *mwana ngho*.’ She got up and came and ran towards him to embrace him. Then Ghambageu said to Nadugana, ‘I am the Ruler of Sologoi. Do not touch me with dirty hands.’ They sat down. ‘Take this, Nagoko. Take this piece of back and the liver. Take it home and eat it.’ She brought home the meat from the back. He sat. They slept. They slept. Dawn came.

Ghambageu said, ‘My friend’

‘My friend’

‘I am going to a foreign place.’

‘Yes’

‘But wait for me. I will return.’ He slept there twice. Then he returned to his sister Nadugana. He brought her until Eroghata. Ghambageu told her, ‘Stay here. This is clay. Make clay cooking pots. The mica is found near Gheeri, but you should live here.’

He stayed, he stayed up there. He got up to go to Soyeta at the time he moved his sister. He went to live in Soyeta. He went to the dancing plaza among the trees. When he went, they were cooking for the *kilemela* celebration. A man appeared. He came from here in Tinaga and ran to Soyeta. He brought himself to a strange place. When he came here, he found them putting out the large beer gourds for *kilemela*. ‘Hey, why is this so-and-so’s beer gourd? Why is that so-and-so’s beer gourd?’ He recognized all the beer gourds and saw that they belonged to the men of Tinaga. He got up. He left them as they began to drink. He ran until he got to Tinaga. As soon as he got there he cried, ‘Oh, oh, oh!’ The people of Tinaga gathered. ‘Men, come in and count your beer gourds.’ They found all of them had sprouted.

‘What, they have all sprouted?’

‘Yes’

Even now you should know that the people long ago were rascals. The people of Tinaga left on that path over there, the one leading down the mountain. They went to cut sticks. They went to fight the men of Soyeta in the area called Kirugurune.

Now Ghambageu was leaning against a tree, sitting on his stool, drinking. They had brewed beer. A sound was heard; *Titisi!* He said, ‘Men, come here. Look for a certain *mubanu* branch.’ Did he not know that they were rising up? Did he not know that they were coming? ‘Look for the branches. They are coming. Look!’ They looked for the branches. ‘Bring me the feathers of a guinea fowl.’ They brought a knife. He

made arrows and set them on fire. He set on fire the feathers of the guinea fowl. The people came from Mulomane by Mwegaro up north, in the area above Soyeta. 'Give me the bow.' *Tiriri!* He aimed for the mountains so the burning arrows fell there, at that mountain they fell.

'We have been pierced by death! We have been pierced by death!' cried the men who were trying to attack. They slept by the bridge of Ikoma. They passed through the country of Roryani. They slept there. The next morning they awoke. They passed Lejong'a. 'We have been pierced by death! Pierced by death!' They went by Mbalageka until they passed it. They went all the way until they became the Waikoma. They went to change the way they talked until they spoke another language. They stayed there. They stayed there until the end.

Ghambageu got up. He said, 'Why does my sister live in Eroghata? She does not belong there, even though I gave her clay there. Bring her back to the central villages here.' He took us, the Baturi, from Eroghata and brought us to Mugholo.

'Take this, Nagoko, let the central villages here suffice for you, to be with the people of the Batemi.' She was satisfied with the central villages. She became like the Batemi completely. She came to Raghari, Eroghata, Kura, Soyeta, Ebwe, and Gheeri. The Muturi was beating iron; he prepared iron for them. She made pots for them just like these. The pots were made by them.

It is just yesterday that Ghambageu did this. Is it not this way? He went to bring people, he went to show them his sister, whom he had brought here. Is that not how it is? Were those not the people who fled over there to become Waikoma? Now the Muturi were not among those who fled. Was not the woman brought here by Ghambageu? They went to live there. There in Eroghata we were given the bellows to blow. You do it like this; with two hands, there and there. You blow like this. We bore a hole in a tree, like a walking stick. This tree has branches. (motioning how the bellows work) Here, there is leather, there is leather. It is coated with clay so it does not burn. Here is the nozzle to blow into.

He was told by Ghambageu, 'Take this iron. Take this hammer. Take this stone as an anvil for pounding on, like this.' The scrap of metal caught fire. When it was burning, he was told, 'Hit it like this, then turn it like this.' He pounded it like this. 'Bring an arrow. Melt the blade.' It was melted so it looked like this. They made a knife out of it by putting on a handle. 'Take it and grind it sharp.' He sharpened it, he sharpened it on two sides. He sharpened it, he sharpened it until the cows of Ghara were pierced here. These were cows brought by the Maasai of Ghara in order to make peace

between the Maasai and the Orumang'adi from far away. That cow was pierced here (he points to nape of his neck) and it died. 'Take this and sharpen it.' He went to sharpen it; the cow was slaughtered and it died.

'Take these'

'Yes'

He told the Batemi, 'Take this back and liver and give it to that sister of mine.' That is the back meat that the priest, the *ghorowane*, gives us. If they have a celebration they give us meat from the back. When the *ghorowane* build a house, this is the piece we are given until now. Do you understand? That is where our people came from. Truly the Baturi came from there. This is the story of where the Baturi came from. How they came here. How they were brought to Eroghata and how they were brought to the central villages. Do you understand? (to bystanders near Klaus) Does he understand? Does he understand everything?

We made iron. We beat it into knives. We beat it into arrowheads. We make large axes for cutting bee hive logs. We beat the long bush knives of the *batana*. Do you hear? There is nothing we cannot make. We make pots to cook food in. But the Batemi are farmers. So they came to trick us; we were given millet. We were given all things to eat. Recently we realized that they were tricking us. We kept asking for farmland until we were given some. The people got smart; we asked for farmland and we worked the fields. Now we were there in Mugholo, we were given a division. We came here.

There are only a few of us left. Nowadays we are farming. There is no one left to make those things. There is only one man left who beats iron. The pots are made by one or two people. There is no one left to make those things. They are all farming. Why is it like this? We are rejected, but it is not bad, not even a little. The people have failed to carry on the craft of making pots. They have failed to beat iron. They have failed in strength. Arrowheads are made until today in Eroghata, they are made. Some other craftsmen have come to Eroghata to make arrowheads. In Kura they are made. In Raghari they are made. I do not know about Soyeta. Even here, people make them. A person makes his own and puts it in his quiver. Even we are farming. Now of those who are beating iron, there is none left. Of those who are left, there is only me who beats. Now I am blind. How am I supposed to continue the work? The children have left these matters. You do not see the tools that are here. There is nothing missing of all the tools I used. They are there.

That son of mine said, 'No'. He does not even know how to make his own knife. He does not know how to make his own arrowheads. I made it for him. Now he has just



begun to learn. So how can he know? He cannot know. We, we were taught. Our fathers taught us. We sat with our fathers and they showed us how to make iron and beat it. Now will the younger ones agree to sit with their fathers and be taught? Why, why are my eyes blind? If I work will my eyes see? They are gone, there is nothing. And of all the girls, there is none to make pots. All those of my wife's age, the one in the house, they will know the craft. Those that still know how to make pots are four or five, no more than that.

The way of the Baturi has been lost; it has completely died out. Of all those who make knives for the Batemi there is none left. Am I not a Muturi? And I do not even have a knife to cut my meat with ...

### 10.3.5 Nagoko<sup>56</sup>

*MF preceded this story with the comment, 'This is where you come from.' She said it without smiling, without the least qualifying statement, like 'this is where we have traditionally said white people come from.' When she got to the part about the locusts, the light beige species that sometimes stops in the Butemine area, she said with great solemnity, 'This is you.'*

This is how the story goes. There once were three children; a girl and her two brothers. The girl was called Nagoko and the boys were named Ghulubeda and Mesaga. They had the feeling that their sister was showing them up. Talking among themselves they muttered, 'Look at the way we have been made to look ridiculous by a mere girl. How can we give her a taste of her own medicine?'

Their father was a god, and he had divided up the earth. The girl went to one part of the earth to look after the calves. The boys, on the other hand, were hunters. Then one evening they came home and placed an iron in the fire until it was red hot. Then they branded their sister because she had taken away their honour in respect to the calves. One of the brothers told her, 'When this calf is born, what color will it be? Will it have a black hide?'

'No, no' she answered, 'It will have a red hide.' When it was born, what color do you think it had? Just as the girl had predicted. Another cow came, and the god's boy

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<sup>56</sup> Rec: MF 10 May 2005, Ebwe

asked again, 'Will this one have a white calf? It is going to be what I say this time, not what a girl says.'

'No, no' she answered, 'it will be red.' And when it was born, what did it look like? Just as the girl had said. She was right every time. The boys grew angry. 'How is it that she is showing us up? We've got to do something about it. We have got to get rid of her.' So on that evening, they put the iron in the fire until it was burning hot.

They called her: 'Nagoko!'

'Yes'

'Come here. You sure have done us a bad turn.'

She said, 'Where are you taking me?'

'Nagoko come here, and bring us the calf so we can brand it.' But Nagoko continued with her own work. She was busy. But they called again, 'Nagoko come here, and bring us the calf for branding.' Then he swore an oath, '*beretu ba segeera!*'

Then she caught the calf and brought it to her brothers. Her brothers jumped out and grabbed her, one on each arm, to pin her down. They branded her face, one mark on each side. The girl escaped. She was wearing a leather cape. *Ghuu!* And she was gone. After she had gone, her father called her, 'Nagoko! Nagoko, where are you?' She cried out, 'I am here on earth.'

He answered, 'But tomorrow you better not refuse me a place to brew honey beer. I am going to give you three children. The first will be a person with an iron staff. The second child will be fire. The third is a locust.' Did you hear that? She only had those three. As the saying goes, 'A father's debt disappears when there is no male child to carry on his responsibilities.' This is the debt the Germans incurred when they burned our gods. The Germans beat up our men.

The father called out, 'Leave me in peace! All I want is a quiet place to drink honey beer. And the only place left on earth is Kisangiro.' Do you hear that? It was Ghambageu who came to visit earth. He was told, 'You, my child, stay here at the entrance of Egawanja and you, my son, stay in the upper city.'

### 10.3.6 Nagorodo<sup>57</sup>

This is what happened; all of a woman's children died. So she worked the fields on her own, all on her own. Her fields were untilled, and so she kept going back. She went to the fields and cried each time. One day, she was followed by her child, Nagorodo, who told her, 'Stop crying. Put your digging sticks here.' So the woman jabbed her digging sticks, maybe two or three of them, into the field. Then she told her husband, 'Sharpen some more digging sticks for me.' Four sticks were sharpened for her, so she took them to the field and left them there. The next morning she went to the field, and found that it had been tilled. She had not been able to put food in a dish for her child, so she had remained as she was. One day she put millet grains in a dish. Later, when she came home from the field, she found that her children had done what? The spirit children had ground her millet into flour. They kept doing this, and the woman was overwhelmed by it all.

The next day the husband, the one who had married her, asked himself, 'Now this woman has been well-nourished. She has containers full of food. Who is it that is dishing out the food for her?' So the man hid in her bed and slept. He hid there so he would see who was helping the woman, because the woman did not have any what? Any children. So he hid there until he saw the girls appear to do their mother's work. They did not pass through the door, but came on a ray of light. Then they ate and were done. When they finished grinding, he jumped up and grabbed his child, *Nabu*! She said, 'Father, stop grabbing me. You are killing me, *Woi*, stop grabbing me, I do not have any bones. You are killing me!' So he grabbed her, and held onto her until the mother came. When she came and found them, the mother cried and cried, '*Woi*, you were envious of me, but I have not got a single thing!'

Nagorodo had turned into a limp thing that could not do anything anymore. So Nagorodo just sat there. There was nothing she could do, not having any bones. Then her relatives who were spirits all came to dance to her; they danced and danced for her. The next day a great hurricane swept down, a terrible whirlwind. It found her sitting outside and *Puu*! It carried her away on her feet. She was carried away by the wind. She was taken to her relatives who were spirits. That was the end of it.

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<sup>57</sup> Rec: MF 10 May 2005, Ebwe

No spirit ever appeared again to help a living person. And since Nagorodo's time, when a person gets sick, it is said that his deceased clansmen are making the child sick. It is said, 'Nagorodo helped by bringing food, but she was taken away by a whirlwind.' When Nagorodo was asked about the *gitemi* law, she explained it all. Nagorodo explained every single thing. But she was taken away by a whirlwind, and she left. That is the end.

### 10.3.7 Narya<sup>58</sup>

The *mwana ngho* used to have a different name which was given by their god Mbirisiyeeta. That is; they were called the Near People. They were given a rope to lasso someone with, and they could catch a person as far away as that millet over there. Then they would pull him all the way over here.

Nadugana, a girl, went to receive a shoulder section of meat. With it, she went to Tinaga, with that shoulder of goat meat. She stayed there until she was a woman, until she was blind with old age. After she had become blind, the man who had given her the meat appeared. He was a god, and he came to Tinaga. Some of the people of Tinaga exclaimed, 'The god of Besanga has come. We see that he's come. Now choose a person who will give one of his goats as a sacrifice to welcome him.' Others answered, 'We know Jila, but we do not know this one from Besanga.' Now Jila was the name of their god.

One old man from the group said to the visitor, 'Now why is it that they refuse to come meet us? Get up, let us go to our place and look for something to eat.' Now this man had only one goat with its kid. Later the visitor (Ghambageu) said, 'Well, what's happening?' The old man answered, 'I do not understand why they have refused to slaughter anything for you.'

The visitor said, 'Why are you catching that goat?'

The man replied, 'You aren't going to sleep on an empty stomach, are you?'

The visitor: 'I won't slaughter a nursing goat. Take the young one instead.'

The man: 'Should I take the kid? It is so small it is still nursing.'

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The visitor: 'It is as big as its mother. Catch it.' He caught it, he caught it. As he was strangling it, it threw out its legs in the death struggle. Each time it kicked, it grew larger and larger, until it was standing. Then he slaughtered it as it stood. Afterwards the visitor said, 'Well, take the back section and prepare it well.'

Then another person came from the people of Tinaga. He observed them very carefully. 'How is it that the goat kid from so-and-so grew to be as big as a cow?' He returned to the men of Tinaga, saying, 'A person slaughtered so-and-so's goat kid, and it grew as big as a cow!' Others said, 'Now you've gotten us into trouble!'

The visitor said, 'Prepare the back section very well.' And it was prepared, along with the kidneys. Then the visitor said, 'Well now, get up and stand over there. Ask around for a person called Nadugana.' The man answered, 'Sure, she lives here.'

The visitor: 'She lives here?'

The man: 'Yes'

The visitor: 'Get up, go over there. Tell her a visitor sends for her and wants her.'

He (the man) was told, 'She has lost her eyesight.'

He (Ghambageu) answered, 'Tell her to come all the same.'

So the man went out. He stood and shouted, 'Nadugana!'

She answered, 'What is it?'

'Come over here. There is a man who's calling for you.'

She said, 'Does that man not know that I do not see a thing?'

'Well get someone to lead you by the hand.' So she came, being led by the hand, and entered the house. The visitor addressed her, 'Nadugana.'

She said, 'What is it?'

'It is me calling you.'

She said, 'So who are you?'

'It is the one who saved you from the Near People when you were in Lweda.' She jumped up, and wanted to embrace him. 'Do not touch me!' he said.

'What should I do then, since I can't see you?' He flicked at her eyes with his gnu-tail whisk. The eyes went *Kwææ!* and she became a young woman again. He told her, 'Here, take this meat, which is your portion. It was slaughtered here for me. You, my sister, take the back and the kidneys. Eat them.'

Now listeners, do you understand? Early the next morning, what's going to happen? The people of Tinaga gathered together. They killed the god with a spear. Someone said, 'Men, let us choose someone to sacrifice a goat. Last night we procrastinated and insulted the god. What will happen today?' In the council of elders it

was said, 'Look for four heifers- of the cows two and of the males two. And bring two young female goats.' There was a man called Narya. Someone said to him, 'Since you are living close by, you should make a start by giving some animals.'

Narya said to the visitor, 'I am giving you this cow.'

He said, 'I do not want it.'

Narya replied, 'So I will give you this one.'

'I do not want it.'

Narya pointed to a different one, 'I will give you this cow.'

'I do not want it.'

'I will give you this cow.'

'I do not want that one either.'

Narya replied, 'Well, there are none left to give you. What is it that you really want?'

He answered, 'If you refuse to give me that spotted cow over there, you have not brought me anything.'

'That one?'

'Yes'

'With the spots? The spotted one? That spotted one goes everywhere with Narya. It dies with me, and not before.'

'Fine, just forget it,' answered the visitor, 'I will be going.'

Have you not seen how a goat sleeps with its young? They sleep all huddled together. And all the young of the spotted cow huddled together with it. When the visitor left, all the spotted cows followed on his heels like dogs. So Narya called to his wife, 'Mama so-and-so!'

She said, 'What?'

'Bring me the spear.'

'Where are you going?'

'I am going to kill that spirit that came. He's not going to take my spotted cow just like that!'

The wife gave him the spear. He pierced the man's thigh. The man took out the spear and threw it back. Narya picked up his spear and pierced that man's lungs. The spear broke the backbone, and he fell on his back. The mob gathered. 'Now you've killed the god of Besanga. We are finished! Get up everyone.' At that time the spring called Ruyyaga was not there yet. Their only water source was the Meryane, on which they depended. The men carried his body. When they put him down, maggots came out

of the body, and caused the water of Ruyyaga to flow. The water flows in three directions.

He was carried again until they reached Lodimi. Maggots emerged and the water started flowing. He arrived at a place called Ngaramodi, which has a little water. Maggots fell and water started flowing. He was moved til they came to Lorogeti. Maggots fell down and the water flowed. He was brought to Orijani ja Mesiro, and the maggots fell. There, where he was finally brought, was the place he had come from. They found a place, about as large as from here to the river, shaped like a circle. I do not know if you have heard of a place called Mgurengine. That is where people were singing in a circle. There he met his sister and his wife, and he said to them, 'I am not able to live among those people anymore. I am going. But do not go outside when I leave. When you hear a sound, do not go outside to look.'

The pool was encircled by people who were still singing and dancing. Were they not singing to god? He told his sister, who was called Naro, 'Take care of this woman whom I am leaving. She is pregnant. When she bears the child, put him in the cattle gate. Tell all the people of Mageri that they should pass their cattle through this one gate. Put the infant in the middle of the gateway like this. If you find any cowdung clinging to him, do not nurse him. If you find any dust on him, abandon him. Do not nurse him. And when it comes to pass that people want to honour their god by slaughtering a cow, the cows will be as untamed as buffalos. Tell them that they should cut strips of bark off the *mugumu* tree, and twist it into his birth bracelet. Then is their demise. Their cattle will leave them.'

Then he covered up his chest with skins, threw the spear into the water, and dived in himself. Great splashes flew into the air, *Muu!* until they reached the clouds. All the people surrounding the pool turned to dust. They died. The next morning his wife bore the child. The council of elders decided to slaughter a cow in his honour, to give him the blessing of birth bracelets. The cows, when chased, charged like buffalos. Then his sister told them, 'I am telling you, leave the cows alone. Go cut strips from the *mugumu* tree, then come. Cut and twist the bracelets.'

And so it was that they went to see whether the child was covered with dung, but there was none. And there was no dust on him. So he was taken home and they all slept. The next morning when they awoke they heard, '*bilibili*'. When they came to look they saw a male eland standing outside. The child said, 'My father's cow has come. Slaughter it for me so that I will have birth bracelets.'

The animal was thrown down. It was hit on the back of the head. It was sacrificed for the birth. The boy said, 'This meat is not for women.' The man's sister replied, 'But how can you leave your mother in such need?' The boy asked; 'What is it you are saying?'

His aunt answered, 'It is impossible for you to leave your mother without even a share of meat.'

The child said, 'I reached the bottom rib in the womb, so she can have the whole innards. But anything above the bottom rib is not suitable for women.'

Now you are asking, what are the ribs? Do the ribs not include all the skin covering them and the lungs? When they reached up to here, the ribs, the men took the front legs, the neck and the head. But when they got past the lungs, they gave the rest to the woman who had borne the child. Do the people of Erughata not have the same tradition nowadays? (addressed to Klaus) Do you not do it like this? Ha! I was just kidding. Anyway, that is how it came about that eland meat is unsuitable for women.

### **10.3.8 People are Born Through the Head<sup>59</sup>**

This is how people were born; this is the news I am telling you. The head swelled up, and on the day the child was born, this was the sign. The mother went away, she died, and in her stead a tree sprout, a *murembye*, appeared. The child was supposed to guard the tree sprout, but afterwards he went off to play and the crow cut it down. *Ghara!* The sprout was dead. Afterwards the man was going to place a beehive in a tree. He was told by the god, 'Your children are born from the head. Tell that woman she should climb the tree first. Then you will see her place. When she comes down from the tree, grab her and throw her down, so you can look at her place.' People were born from the head. Is it not the god who came along to disrupt that?

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<sup>59</sup> Rec: Masando Sediyya Feb 1 2007, Ebwe



### 10.3.9 The Sun Fathers a Child<sup>60</sup>

Some girls went out weeding near Masing'ane. They pulled out the weeds and then went to wash themselves, the two of them. Ryoba, the sun, came out and threw its rays down. It threw the girl down. She bore Hooru, you hear? She bore Kilemela. She bore Simbaroga. She bore Ghambageu. They were born of a woman of the Batemi. Those were her children.

On that day, the god of that place came to the Ghandamuri people. By intercourse they were born. Yes, they were born because of intercourse. They gave birth by entering. Those gods were born of a woman of the Batemi. Now then, how does the saying go?

‘A Mughandamuri does not break the bone.’

The Mughandamuri is a Temi person who gave birth to three gods. The Batemi from Masing'ane are indeed those same people.

### 10.3.10 Two Women<sup>61</sup>

Once there were two women who were married to the same man. One of them had children, but the other was barren. Now the children of the one woman were wasting away with hunger. The man was called to appear before the *ghuseri*, the village council, where all the men had gathered. His children were there, picking the lice off their bodies. So the council asked the man, ‘What are your children eating?’ And he answered them, ‘My children eat lice.’ Can you even believe that? His children were eating the lice as their food! Now all the men at the *ghuseri* were present.

So the man was asked, ‘And is your hunger satisfied with lice?’

‘No,’ was his answer.

‘So what in the world did you do to get yourself in this situation?’

‘Nothing,’ he sulked. ‘I wasn’t feeling too well, but it is nothing.’

You hear that? There wasn’t anything sicker about him than there usually is among men! So the men persisted, ‘Is that really what you are giving your kids to eat?’

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Rec: MF May 2005, Ebwe

Lice? Is that food?’ The man himself was living with the barren woman. Since she did not have any children to cook for, the little bit of greens that she could gather all went into feeding the man. So the man got up from the *ghuseri*. He gave his wife a skinny goat, one with hardly any fur. So off she went. She went far, far away to look for food. She was travelling back to the place she had come from. I do not know the name of the place, but it was a long way off.

Before she arrived, she met two young men, *batana*. They had met up because the road was so long, and there were no trees along the way to block the view. So the *batana* had come up to her and asked her, ‘Where are you going?’ She answered, ‘I have been given this goat kid to sell so that I can find food for my children.’ The *batana* told her, ‘Give it to us.’ Now as they were talking they arrived at the village gateway to their home. The *batana* were the deceased from her clan; her own two older brothers who had died! They told her, ‘We are going in here, but you need to listen to what I say. Follow me. But if I say anything to you, do not answer a word. Do not say anything.’ So they went and went.

When they arrived there, the woman saw her mother. How the mother cried and cried, ‘*Hii, hii, hii!* My sons, why have you brought my daughter so-and-so to join us? Oh, I do not even have a stool for her to sit on!’ That is when the young man answered, ‘No, mother, I have not brought her to stay. Listen to how we met one another on the road. She had been cast off, looking for food for her children.’ Then the mother took her daughter and returned her to the dividing wall. The woman’s two children were there too, and one of them said, ‘Mother, why is there a strange smell here?’ The mother answered, ‘This one has one kind of smell and that one has another kind of smell.’ But the children persisted in asking, ‘Why is there a strange smell here?’

The woman took out her gourd. She took it and cleaned it, and then she cooked for her children with a small cooking pot. For two nights she was there. On the third night the *batana*, her older brothers, brought her back. She had been given one *sonjo* (lablab) bean, one millet seed, one pigeon pea. That is, of each kind of food she had been given one seed. So when she came back home, she came back with her older brothers, and into every leather storage bag in the house she placed one seed. If it was a cowpea, she put it here. A single millet seed, she put it there. Sorghum, a single seed there. A mung bean here, millet there, a lablab bean over there. When they were done putting the seeds into different storage bags, they took the small lamb, slaughtered it, and stretched out its skin. ‘I am going now,’ said her brother. ‘You have forgotten me. You have forgotten me ...’

The next morning the woman woke up and found her house completely filled up with food. All the storage bags were overflowing. The children had been eating lice as their food, but now it would be different. So the woman, as she was cooking, decided to serve up a platter for her husband, the man who had given her a goat kid to sell. She went over to bring the man some food. Can you believe that? She took the food over to her co-wife's house and placed the steaming dish in front of him. And what did he do? He ate it and finished the whole thing.

The next day she did the same; she cooked for her husband, put it in a dish, and brought it to him. By the third evening, the man decided to see for himself. The woman was still in the fields, but had left her two children sleeping in the doorway as guards. The woman had wanted to prevent him from entering, but he jumped over them and entered the house. Wherever he groped in the dark house, he found bags and bags filled with food. The whole house was full whenever he reached out to grab something. That was the hour he decided to act.

He went to the barren woman's house. She too was still in the fields. He went in, and began to pull up all the supporting beams and pillars. He drove out all the goat kids that had been inside, and the house collapsed. That is when the barren woman came home. In her anguish she was writhing on the ground. She wailed, though none heard her, 'In the end, what was I supposed to have done?' After a while, she called the child of her co-wife, 'Come here. Can you bring me some coals to light my fire anew?'

When the man heard what the child was supposed to do, he told her, 'Go tell that woman, 'Is it my fault that you aren't having any children?' Tell her to bring herself over here, or just send her "piece" on over.' When the poor barren woman heard this, she cried out, 'Yee!'

Now this is how the story has been told to me: She made a fire, and then put a burning brand inside herself between her legs. The next day the husband found her. Do you hear what I am saying? This is exactly how the man found her. She had killed herself by stabbing a burning branch into her womb.

## 10.4 Initiation Accounts

### 10.4.1 An Account of Temi Male Initiation by AM, AJ, and ES<sup>62</sup>

#### Ekorya Bijɔɔri (growing boys into men)

Circumcision – The uninitiated boys are being circumcised before they are initiated (grown into adulthood). They spend four months as *nebaradani* (the Maasai term for the boys of the age before they enter adulthood). On the fifth month this period is ended by Kirimo.

#### How Kirimo enters

The council of the elders is gathering and the issue of Kirimo is being discussed. A procession is getting ready to go to Raghari. Upon their return Kirimo is arriving in the village. On the day when the uninitiated boys transition, they enter the main plaza at around 3 pm where they are being greeted by the sound of the horn of Kirimo coming from the hills. All the men present in the village are going, they are running to the *ghuseri* to meet Kirimo, rejoicing in loud voices. When they arrive there, they begin to form a circle and sing the *kibeneda* song. When the announcer (*mutalɔngi*) arrives, he announces Kirimo. Kirimo is descending into their midst. Then the procession of men is moving from the meeting place to the Kiritone plaza, singing the song called *kirembe*. The group of uninitiated boys who have been dancing at the Kiritone are being dispersed and depart, each one going to his clan home. There their heads are shaved by their mothers and they put on a goat skin and wear leather shoes. Then they meet again in order to be led to the stream to wash. Once they come away from the stream, they are being led to eat the lablab beans (*sonjo*) prepared at different places. When they return, they are meeting again at the first place.

When they have finished cooking the evening meal, then Kirimo appears on the mountain. Afterwards it appears at the village gateway (*kijomi*). The boys are brought to the gateway by the men, where they are taught about how things will proceed, and how they will be ‘brought’ one by one. They are grabbed by the *batana* and gather by the

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<sup>62</sup> Written Dec 2004, Ebwe

house near the gate (*mutala jwa kijomi*). They stay there until the ‘elephant hour’ (3am) when they eat some left-overs. When they leave there they go to the springs. When they get to the spring, they find that a place has been prepared for them to sit. Then the men will provoke them. If it is evening (5 pm), they are given food and they eat.

When they are done eating, they gather together and are told, ‘Stretch out your palms.’ They are told that they will be ‘thrown down by the *mbogo* (idiom for blessing)’, and then they see the horn, and watch as it is being blown. Then they spread out; each person with his relatives, his uncle, his father, his older brothers. When they are done being taught, the others who had come along get up, and the boys are left at the house near the gate. On that day the *maghandala* sticks come out, but the boys do not appear until the following morning.

That next day, when the goats are resting in the sun, Kirimo comes to the gate. All the guards run to the gate. The Kirimo comes out and forcefully enters the house of a man who has cows. The dancing crowd gets up from the gate to where the goats are resting in the sun. They are dancing as a crowd. They keep dancing until they arrive at the house that was chosen.

The man who was chosen slaughters a cow, and meat is cooked. Women cook ugali, and then the group gathers at the house where the cow was slaughtered. They eat and then they slip a section of cow skin over their fingers, the *gighoba* ring. The group gets up from there and goes to the Kiritone. When they arrive there, they are brought to their houses. When they are done, they are brought to the house by the gate. That is where they sleep.

The next day, they are brought to where they can eat, then they return to the gate. Kirimo sounds eight times, then it is finished, then it is completed. When it is completed, then on that evening, the *batana* are sung about, that they are the new ones. The next day they wake, and they are brought to the meeting of their age-set. A *sedani* offering is taken for them, and then they begin singing. The older ones are told to stop wearing the skins, and the younger ones are told to wear them.

#### Ehirwa Kirimo (Initiation from the women and children’s point of view)

When the boys get together, they decide they want to be circumcised (*esoora ndaghuya*), and they tell the *etongo*, ‘We want to be circumcised.’ So the council meets and deliberates; they test the boys, give them irrigation ditches to clean, tasks of getting honey, even from fierce bees. If they are able to do these tasks, they are told, ‘You are allowed the knife.’ They are allowed the knife of circumcision.

The boys prepare the celebration by asking for honey, if it is available, for the sake of the day of circumcision. When that day arrives they enter the celebration of circumcision.

That day, they go to the *ghorowane* temple to sing there, and stay up all night. The next day they go to the house of one of their relatives, and decorate themselves there. They put on bells and go to Murongeta. When they arrive, they put on colour. When they come out of the houses they go to sing until they arrive at the gate, that is where the men have been waiting for them. They are taught how to live. Then they return in the evening to sing. Again, the men are waiting for them at the gate, and they are taught how to enter the clan. They sing. That is; the older men sing, and the boys sing the chorus, which is a ‘hmmm’ of assent. In the song, the men insult all those boys who are afraid of getting circumcised.

The leader sings:

*Naanjabo* (an insult)

*Naanjabo*

For those who are afraid

Split open their guts

Just like a cowrie shell

*Hoyyo ho*

The next morning, as it is dawning, they are circumcised. The one who has been circumcised without showing fear is sung about with songs of praise. If he showed fear they sing songs to shame him. They stay *nebaradani* for 3 or 4 months, carrying *ndang’uri* sticks and then they are ‘shaken up’ by Kirimo. Kirimo speaks from the springs (*būiso ndane*). The *mutalangi* (announcer) says, ‘I want to eat my children.’ It is said, ‘So-and-so’s father, *hoi, hoi*.’ While the initiates hear the older ones say, ‘Greet so-and-so and this one and that one.’ The boys sleep on the Kiritone and sing a song called *soongwe*. The *soongwe* lyrics:

Leader: child, *naanjabo* (insult)

*Nebaradani* chorus: *soongwe*

Leader: come here and take your *ndang’uri* stick

Chorus: *soongwe*

Leader: so that you can go hunting with it

Chorus: *soongwe*

Leader: in the wilderness where one gets lost

The following day at dawn their heads are shaven, and they wear the clothes of the *nebaradani*. They give one *ndang'uri* to a younger brother or a younger relative. As they are sitting they sing the songs of the boys who lament over themselves. They sing, 'Woi (lament), where are we going? The time of our youth has ended.'

In the eleventh month, Kirimo returns to say that it is time to re-roof the temple. Women and girls from all the age-sets come to bring roofing grass. When they have done all the temples, Kirimo calls them to re-roof the hut by the gateway. The next day the women go to cut grass for the roof. When the women are done roofing, then Kirimo comes to visit his house. That following evening he speaks from the hillside. Then the men run to the acacia tree at the *ghuseri* (council grove), calling out, 'wau, wau.' There at the Kiritone you will find the *bijɔɔri* dancing. When the *mutalongi* comes, he announces Kirimo by saying, 'Father Ngasiliga. Hoi, hoi. It swallows every day. You have come to greet your council.' When Kirimo is announced, it throws the men down inside. When Kirimo descends, the men are thrown down, dancing the *kibeneda*. When they are finished dancing the *kibeneda*, the whole crowd leaves the acacia tree at the *ghuseri*, and proceeds to the Kiritone. Before the crowd has arrived at the Kiritone, the *bijɔɔri* stop their own dances there.

Then they all divide up, going to their homes to have their heads shaved. Then the crowd that is left at the Kiritone dances, with the extremely aged women dancing before the face of Kirimo. After the group has arrived at the tree, then they stop dancing. They decorate themselves and start dancing. Now the old men who have gotten up have started teaching the *bijɔɔri*, and leave the *batana* dancing. When the *bijɔɔri* have finished having their heads shaven, then they go to bathe. Then in the evening, the child is called, and he finds that his mother has cooked *sonjo* beans. As soon as they are done bathing, they are brought to eat *sonjo* beans, and they find that in each clan they are wearing a leather cape. At this point the *batana* are dancing at the Kiritone. In the evening, Kirimo comes to the mountain, saying, 'Nankone wants to bring her children.' This is when the women are terribly afraid. This is when Kirimo is jumping up and down, moving inside the group back, back towards the hill, where it will only speak to the men. The *mutalongi* announces, 'I have sworn to you by Kabaradeeda. I have sworn to you by your mother-in-law's inner skirts.' That is how Kirimo descends among the men.

Then Kirimo is brought to the gate, and when it is there, the *bijɔɔri* come and gather in one place. Then a young boy who is known for his discipline and for respecting men and women is chosen to open the gate or the gatepost. That is when they start to call to one another. They say, ‘Father, peace on your cattle and on your homes. Cut a club from the *egirigirya* tree, and I will cut one from the *musunetu* plant, then we will meet in the middle.’ The young boy who announced this goes through the gate and is eaten by Kirimo. If the boy has slept with a woman, Kirimo tells him, ‘You smell like a woman.’ If the boy has been in the army, then the horn sounds like a rifle. If he’s been a driver, it sounds like a car. Whatever kind of work you did when you were young, the sound of the horn will tell it. If you made a girl pregnant with twins, you plead with Kirimo to take away those twins. That is how Kirimo deals with the boys.

The *bijɔɔri* who have been shaven discover that a stone has been placed where their liver used to be. The *batana* are now fierce. There is nothing that they are afraid of anymore, in comparison with when they were *bijɔɔri*. The next day they look for the *batana* who were making the sounds of wild animals. The voices were heard of hyena, leopard, lion, and all the bad predators.

Then a woman who has raised a child will prepare two gourd dishes; one for her son, and one for the person who finds her son. That is because it is said that one group will be spread out here, and another there, and then they will be gathered. They say that there is no *mutana* who has matured who has a red scar on his chest. In fact, they paint their whole bodies with red paint to hide that one red scar, so that they will be accepted by Kirimo.

On that day when they are taken, in the evening the *maghandala* sticks are brought out. The crowd comes out from the area in the springs, because they say that the sticks have been thrown down by Kirimo. So Kirimo comes and they move toward the Kiritone along with the sticks that are carried by the *batana*. When they arrive at the gates they begin to sing *eghuuja kalya* (Devouring Song):

Leader: Birimo eats

Chorus: devour

Leader: it eats children

Chorus: devour

Leader: children and their fathers

Chorus: devour

Leader: it eats the eland



Chorus: devour

Leader: it eats the hearth-fires (marriages)

Chorus: devour

When they finish the 'Devouring Song', the crowd dances. Then they sing the *mase* songs until the evening. Then Kirimo is brought to the gate, to his own domain, where he looks after his own children. The next morning, Kirimo goes to visit a man who has cattle, in order to speak there. This is a good man, with no badness, who will prepare the celebration for the age-set. When Kirimo is finished there, it goes to the gate to speak to all of the people there. Here they begin the jumping song *kibeneeda*. They sit around, there where the goats rest in the sun, until the crowd draws them and they are facing the house that has been chosen, where they sing in a slow moving crowd.

Then the *mutalongi* asks Kirimo what the name of the new age-set will be, and Kirimo says what the name will be, and then they move together dancing, singing the name of their age-set. They sing until they reach the house that has been selected.

*Mukuhyo* (dense crowd) Song:

Leader is Kirimo

Chorus: The place of the dense crowd, there is coming and going, place of the dense crowd, my Erigibali (example name of an age-set)

Chorus: The place of the dense crowd, there is coming and going, place of the dense crowd

Leader Kirimo: they sleep in the wilderness, they are the ones called, they sleep in the wilderness

Chorus: they sleep in the wilderness, they are the ones called, they sleep in the wilderness, my Erigibali

When they are done there they go to the Kiritone, and from there they are brought to the different houses to greet people. When they arrive, they stand outside, and then they return to the Kiritone. Every mother finds out that her son has not been rejected. Then they are brought from the plaza and from there to the gate, where they enter the rest of Nankone. They are given only one *sonjo* bean, because their throats have not hardened. Kirimo sounds, as usual, eight times. Around noon it finishes, that is, in the morning it finishes. During this time some of the *batana* sit beneath the acacia tree at the *ghuseri*, others rest by the gate. In the evening they announce a meeting of the age-sets.

The next morning they come out, and go to a meeting where the offering is decided, along with choosing their leaders and the leaders' assistants and helpers. Then

they are taught how to live. They are told, ‘Now that you are *batana*, do this, accomplish that, live this way.’ They are directed in all matters. Then they are sung about for the second time, because they are now *batana*.

#### How the *bijɔɔri* are eaten by Kirimo (from the women and children’s point of view)

If there is a boy who is not respectful, who does not respect men or women, then he is pierced with a post from the gate, and calls out ‘Ow,ow’ until he’s begging for mercy. The women encircle him and also plead, saying, ‘We swear to you on the inner skirt of Senga (goddess of Mugholo). I swear to you on the inner skirt of Gooko. I swear to you on the skirt of Nankone.’ That is how a boy is accepted to be eaten by Kirimo. So the boys who have shown respect are told by Kirimo that they should stop torturing the others. Afterwards they all spread out beyond all of the gates. The next day they go to rescue one, one who has been eaten by wild animals. It is Nankone who gives them something to eat, who gives them a single *sonjo* bean. This is when Kirimo is announced. It says that it comes from its council (*girerega*) to look after the parents, and to prepare the celebration.

#### How the *bijɔɔri* are trained up by the men

On the second day the *bijɔɔri* are told, ‘Stretch out your palms; you will be thrown down by the cowrie shell.’ So they stretch out their palms and Kirimo begins to speak. When they are done being thrown down by the cowrie shell, one man gets up and says, ‘This is indeed *gitemi*. Now that you’ve seen how our ancestors are honoured, it is this very tradition. This is what makes men into men. This is what makes the women respect us. This is what makes us Batemi.’

After they’ve finished being told this, they divide up, every person with his relatives. A person will be with his uncle, or his father, his relatives and his friends. Everything about *gitemi* is explained to them, and they are told to follow it carefully. They are told that it is like following the bowstring over the bow. They are told it is like passing along the edge of a knife. They are told to protect this *gitemi*, and to sew their mouths shut. Do not dig around in the nostrils. Respect women and children. Your youth is for accomplishing things. This *gitemi* subsumes your relatives and is to be followed vigorously.

#### How the children of Kirimo are given *marimiti* sticks

So when they've finished being thrown down by the cowrie shell, and are done being taught about *gitemi*, then Kirimo speaks. The *maghandala* sticks are thrown down, and each person is given his own. If a person is known for not taking good care of goats, he's given a twisted stick. When the children of Kirimo emerge, then they do not have strength the way they did when they were drawn by Kirimo. So because they have not recovered their strength, their sticks are carried for them. The children of Kirimo, when they want to eat, they will demand beads as presents, and will shake his stick threateningly. So each person, when he emerges, will have *ndengeri* sewn for him by his relatives and by women. So when they are given the bead decorations they attach them to their *maghandala* sticks. Some are given a *mijughu* (beaded decoration), some a Senga wire, and others a strand of white beads. So this is how they remain inside Kirimo (*kirimone*); they wear sandals made of leather until they emerge. On the day that Kirimo finishes, then they finish by taking off those sandals. So on that evening when Kirimo finishes, praise songs are sung that they are now *batana*.

On the next day they are taught, and the younger boys are given the skins. The older ones sing. And the *batana* who were found to be without respect will continue wearing the skins, if they are not too young.

#### **10.4.2 Personal Initiation Account ES<sup>63</sup>**

I want to tell about the day I was brought to Kirimo. On that day I did this one thing. I woke up in the morning. When I awoke in the morning, I heard singing. The ones singing were the *ndong'ori* (uninitiated boys). In those days they were singing daily for two months. So on this day I woke in the morning and found there was singing. A lot of singing and afterwards they scattered. After they scattered, everyone went to his home. So, as the day passed they gathered again to sing. There was singing, lots of singing, lots of the normal songs that the *ndong'ori* like to sing. This day every person knew that when evening came, then Kirimo would visit. So during the whole day the men walked around with skin capes ...

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<sup>63</sup> Rec: ES Aug 2006, Ebwe

They sang until it was 3 pm when they finished the songs. Afterwards they chose each other. *Bijjori* of this family went to that one, those were brought to their place, and others were brought to that place. As for me, I remember that we went to our place. We were brought up (to the hills). There we gathered. Here we were shorn by a person. While you are having your head shorn, shoes are cut for you. Skin capes are put on you. We were completely shaven.

Afterwards when we had gathered here, when we had finished being gathered, we were brought down. We were gathered at Tamikise's, at Kagorise's. So we were brought there. Afterwards all the people filled the place. Afterwards you hear a person saying you should cover yourself with your cape to keep off the *bagerera* flies. So now I asked myself, what kind of a fly is a *bagerera* fly? Afterwards you are told to cut, and chase them away so that the flies do not take the meat from the *bijjori*. So I watched, and I watched. Afterwards the place was filled. After being filled, the saw the *bijjori* of one family were brought by the men of their home.

So afterwards when we were gathered, we were brought to the stream. When we were brought to the stream we were small. We were looking at those who were older than us. The *ndong'ori* who were bigger than us. So we passed the women's place at the stream. We went upstream to Mibiri, to a place called Mibirine. When we arrived there we were told to wash. 'Wash, at once, quickly, let us go!'

So that is how we arrived here. Sometimes you see trees quaking, sometimes you see things together that all cry out like a donkey, or others like a dog. Sometimes you see people crouching in the undergrowth. We were frightened because we heard the sounds of all the wild animals there inside that gate. So we washed. We were told, 'Cover your loins.' So we covered ourselves. We were so astounded. I was very astounded because I had never seen things like that before. So we were told, 'We are singing, we are singing, as the men will sing.' Then the men from Raghari came, the men called Sugumese and Munyambise. So we were taught the songs to sing.

Afterwards we were told, '*Hembuuje, Hembuuje, Hembuuje*' and so you beat, beat the leather capes as the men dance regularly there. One time, a man came. He fell down, vomiting blood. But I understood that it is not blood that he is vomiting, it is only the blood of a goat that he put in his mouth to frighten us. Then the men pretended to be crying.

Another time a man was carried away, and we were told, 'Pursue him and beat the wildebeest.' The one man appeared who was beating a small fly whisk made of grass. He got up again.

Another time someone else appeared wearing a Maasai *nghala*, and throwing himself down. He was talked about, that he was really a Maasai woman wearing Maasai jewellery. Those are the ‘games’ they played with us in that place.

Another time it was said, ‘Are you done washing?’ It was answered, ‘Yes’, even though there was no time to wash well, just to pour a little water over oneself.

‘Let us get up and protect ourselves, so that other *bijjori* do not hide themselves nearby.’ So the other *bijjori* were very much afraid. That is how we were taught. When we left there at Mujurine, we went home. So as we were leaving the stream, the *bijjori* had hidden long knives and sticks there at the stream where the women draw water. They gathered together like a swarm of bees. They gathered here, and took out the sticks. They were divided up, it was divided up between all people until they all looked alike, until they were all piled up.

After the men had seen all this, they too were terrified, and they said, ‘Men, are you all fighting one another? Are you fighting with Kirimo or are you fighting with *batana*? Bring out those sticks and those *bijjori* who have not agreed (to submit) yet.’

But there was no one who agreed to give up his stick. There were older *bijjori* who had come from the army who told them, ‘Even if you take us by force, we have other weapons. So will you take us by force again?’

Then they were asked, ‘What kind of weapons do you have, atomic bombs?’

They answered, ‘That is right, we have even got bombs ...’

Then the men were immersed in fear. So they agreed to depart. When they departed, then the group was able to be brought to the village. They went to eat *sonjo* beans. Afterwards you all found a skin on which *sonjo* beans had been placed. You all went to take them, and when you were finished you went to another place from family to family. So the *sonjo* beans were eaten.

Then we gathered together at Tamise’s. After we gathered we sat for a long time until it was evening. When Kirimo came to visit, there was singing, there was singing, yes singing. It had been awaited, the evening when the *bijjori* who have grown are brought. Afterwards, the *bijjori*, we were brought, we were brought to the gate. We went to announce it to one another. Afterwards we were chosen.

It was said, ‘Where is so-and-so?’ One boy was chosen named Mujusi. ‘Where is Mujusi?’ It was said, ‘Here he is.’

‘Bring the polite boy (*nale nsoni*), the one who respects women.’

It was said, ‘Where to? We are not going one at a time, because as you know, the last time we were threatened.’ Then those came who said, ‘You will all be thrashed with

sticks and will die. You *bijɔɔri* will see.’ So they cut sticks for themselves and hid them. So the *bijɔɔri* got up and we all went to one place. There were none who returned again to call one another ‘Erubaranodi’ (younger *bijɔɔri*). They returned to the middle. So the leaders of the *ndong’ori* stood up looking in all directions. They stood up here and there. It was said, *tulu* (fight). If a *mutana* is encountered, beat him with a stick. He is hit; whether he’s a man, or whether he’s a *mutana*. That is when Birimo sounded. I say, there was heard a *tulu*, a fight, from the upper gate until we arrived at the lower gate. When they had all arrived, one man said, ‘Well, I have stopped seeing here. You can all go back.’ ‘So let us all go back.’

Then we fought very violently until some of the *batana* were afraid and were dispersed by the men. When a person arrived he was beaten with sticks until he fell down right there. Now there were some of the older *bijɔɔri* who were hardened with strength. They refused to call to one another as is the custom of the *bijɔɔri*. They gathered together as a group, they all gathered in one place, and the *ndong’ori* said to one another, ‘Let us not appear by the gate.’

So they returned, they returned. Afterwards we sat and sat and talked things through. The older men rescued us until we saw that we were safe. We were brought to the house near the gate and went to sit there. It wasn’t long before we were woken up around 2 am. We were told, ‘Get up and go to the *mukuhyo* by the gate.’ There we found a fire had been lit, and the old men were encircling it. We were told, ‘As you are singing, you will hear something. As we (the men) respond to it, in that way you will respond to it.’ So we listened to what they were saying. So they sang the song called *kihɔɔra*. The song says, ‘Watered land, watered land, our fathers please buy the watered land.’

Afterwards the walking sticks are placed in the fire and he says, ‘Whoever speaks (about the secret) will die. He will be pierced with thorns. He will be strangled by the snake dropping down from the rocks. He will be thrown down by the horn (of a wild beast).’ We did not understand that this was a curse, but people swore agreement and swore agreement until we were finished. So we were told, ‘Follow, and follow the men, the fathers, who have preceded you.’ So we got up from there and followed the pathway heading towards the irrigation furrow called Bagagheera, and we stood at that place. When we got to Mibirire at the stream up above, we entered *biiso ndane* (near the spring). We saw a place to sit, so we sat there. We sat and sat until it was morning. Even then we sat and sat until the older men came, strangers who came to question us. They brought a little grass and we were taunted with a small bow. You were asked, ‘What is

this?’ When they were done questioning, they left and others came to question us about these matters. When they were done, they left. Then others came and played around with us until we saw the sun ready to set, until the sun was setting. So around 3 pm we were brought a little maize porridge in a small dish for the size of the group. So we ate and when we had finished we started to gather again.

We were surrounded by *batana*, by older men. We were surrounded, as though they were a bracelet around us. When we were finished being surrounded, we were asked questions. You were asked, ‘What is this thing?’ Some say, ‘I know,’ and others answered, ‘I do not know.’ So we were asked questions until we came to a place where a man stood up. He threw off his leather cape, and took the horn, and blew it. All the people fell down, they fell down with a strong yearning, and they fell down with strong yearning. We were encircled and now we got up. Each person understood what that thing is. Then there was rest.

Getting up from there each person was grabbed by his uncle, pulled by his father, and his father’s younger brother. He was told, ‘Now you know how the Batemi live. Now you have to do this one thing; come, sew your mouth shut. Leave your nose, and protect against women and *bijɔɔri* and what-not.’ You are brought to follow *gitemi* by your father, your uncle, your father’s younger brother, or some male relative of your father’s. So people were divided up by families.

It came to a place where you are brought your *eghandala* (2 meter long stick). Your *eghandala* is brought to you. You are told, ‘This indeed is your *eghandala*.’ If you get up from here, Kirimo eats you. When you get up from here, you go to the *mukuhyo* in the village. When you arrive, you eat. When you get to the gate, you break and enter the house near the gate. There you stay. The next morning you will eat. You eat and go into the village. The *bekerya* (age-set leaders) enter with your long reed-switches that you took out, but you stay at the gate until the next morning. You eat, and afterwards there is singing. There is so much singing. You are brought to eat food like at home and it is said that now you are children of Kirimo.

So that is how you experience those days until the signs are completed. When the singing is over and it is done, then it is done. You are done being initiated the following day when you are brought to the meeting and now you are all *batana*. That is how I saw we did it, we were *hogelwa* (dance with slow crouching movement toward the plaza). After that we went up to the meeting and we were *batana*. That is what I have seen in my growing up. That is all.

### 10.4.3 Personal Initiation Account MD<sup>64</sup>

My name is MD and I was born in 1975 the year that we were moved by the Swahili to Ndilane. So we lived there until I began to have some understanding. When we began to have understanding, we understood good and bad. We were children. So we arrived at a stage where we were *ndong'ori*, and we wanted to be circumcised. When we wanted to be circumcised, we had a gathering of our leaders like the gathering of the older ones who look for the knife, the matters of circumcision.

There was a gathering of the older men, and they thought it was just games that are played by us, the *bijɔɔri*, we are still playing games. One day we were told to clean the irrigation furrow that is up above the church to the left. When we were told to do it, we answered the men, 'We won't do it because we aren't *batana* yet.' We were told, 'If you do not do it, you won't be circumcised.' Our group will be circumcised because we have grown up. So we returned and were told, 'You will make the road here from Moni's place going down to the place where the goat-path comes down.' So we slashed the fields, the one belonging to Enoch in Masone, the road that has been made to get to Reera. We uprooted trees. So we pounded the road up to the goat-path.

When we finished in 1994, the men agreed that we could be circumcised. In the sixth month, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1994, we were told we could be circumcised. We were circumcised in that month. When we were finished with that, we ate *bune baradani* (celebration of finishing circumcision) it was a time to be glad because now we are done being *nebaradani*, because we have come to understand that we were *batana* now, we saw all things because now we were really *batana*. So that is how we completed the circumcision process. We had completed starting in the eleventh month, so that we had matured, someone who is waiting to be brought to Kirimo.

So the time came for us to be brought to Kirimo. We came from dancing. On that day a man came to bring the *bijɔɔri*, it was night. He came at 4 in the morning. So we woke up, our age-set, from where we were sleeping at the Kiritone, there in the dark, knowing that we will be seen (by Kirimo). We knew that we would be seen, but we did not know the place where it would happen! On that day we were very much afraid! We said that we would be killed by the *batana* because we were found sleeping in the same place as them.

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<sup>64</sup> Rec: 20 Nov 2009, Ebwe



On that day, on that day we were told we would be brought the next day. So we stayed there together dancing until it was 3 in the afternoon. When it was 3 pm the Old Man (*monto mukolo*) spoke on the hillside. So our age-set sang about sadness/longing because you are going to a place/path you do not know. The thing you know you leave behind, you are entering a different stage. I had become a *mutana* so we had not reached the gladness, so we were agitated because it is necessary. We agreed on its necessity.

So we got up from there at 6 pm. We left there and came to the meeting and gathered ourselves there. When our age-set had gathered there, we saw the men coming. 'Men, each person was following his friend, each one and his best friend. They came to the places to be swallowed.' So each person got up from there. We got up from there, each person saw his people. They took off everything; there was not one thing that you did not throw down. There we were covered with skin, each and every piece of clothing was taken off, and then you were covered with skin. Those skins from that time on you are told, 'Cover it up.' That is the beginning of the games. We were told, 'Get up.' We got up to be washed, and we returned. There where we were washed we were tricked again. For example a man was laying as dead. Then we were told, 'He is dead, but wake him up.' Or we were told, 'He is a woman.' Then because we had come, because we were grown up, we had long words, and we came to understand that they were tricking/fooling us. Afterwards we took heart because we were a large group, so we stopped being afraid. So that is how the men and the *batana* tricked us, which was their way of getting us.

Then they made gourds speak. They sounded like beasts of prey. They told us, 'It is an elephant.' There is no elephant that cries like that gourd which says '*bɔɔ*'. So that is how we were fooled. When we got up from there we were told, 'Put on your clothes. Let us go and return.'

When we returned we gathered together and we were told, 'Sit in a place and eat *sonjo* beans'. So we went to eat *sonjo*. When we ate *sonjo* then it was night, ten at night. We were called there by the Old Man. We got up from there from eating *sonjo*, and all our age-set gathered to be brought to the village gates near the spring.

When we got to the gates we were told, 'Stay put here.' So we all hung around. Our age-set was new because there was none of us who had experienced it before. We sat and we sat until the men said, 'Get up you *batana* of the head; begin to call the Old Man.' There inside the gates there had begun to grow banana stalks. Inside these the *batana* had hidden '*mbale*.' So for the reason that people do not know what happens

there, they are surprised and wonder what that thing is? How did those banana stalks get there, since we are always passing here and there are no stalks growing?

We all got up as one, as one we went to speak. So, because I had realized that I did not have any person to stand up with me, in my arrogance I got up and said 'I too will go. I will not wait to the end.' So I got up and went until I met a man who was sitting at the gates. He asked me, 'What's your name?' I told him, 'I am called So-and-so. 'So do you know that all those children are born, do you hear? How many children do you have?'

'I do not have any children, I have not even borne one.'

'But the one who gave birth to you in Kenya.'

I told him, 'There is no one who gave birth to me.'

I was told, 'Cut those bananas so you see where they go, because you are going on a long journey.' I was astonished, and I said, 'Are two or three bananas cut when a person goes on safari, with just two bananas?' So I cut the bananas because I did not understand what was happening, but I went to be called down below. When I arrived I found one *mutana* sitting on this side, and another on that side. I stumbled on a root, but I saw that they were holding onto the root to trap people. When a person tripped on the root he began to run and then is caught. I tripped and stumbled and fell. I found two people who put those things that are found in the stream on me. So when they put those things on me, I jumped and jumped and jumped and jumped. They must have thought, 'Who is this person who's jumping like this and running away?' They grabbed me, so I was grabbed by one person who hit me with leather in the nose until I bled. When I bled, they grabbed me and brought me, until I was brought to the *mutala* (shelter). When I was brought to the *mutala* I found that something was thrown at me.

I was told, 'Wake up your head, I will hit you on the head with a knife until you fall down over there.' And then I fell asleep because I was waiting for one man to come. He told me, 'I have come.' He told me: 'Get up; sit here close by.' So I got up and sat there and waited. So I waited until the blood stopped flowing, I got up and sat in that place. People talked to me there. When they finally stopped talking all of us people filled that *mutala*.

It was almost the next morning because the people had finished talking to me at 3 in the morning. So we were told, 'Get up.' We were brought to the fig tree that is between the gates. When we were brought to the fig tree by the gates we were told, 'Walk around the fire and come back here.' I was astounded that that fire had been bewitched (*muuma*) so that a person who speaks words of *gitemi* will die. So we did

what we were told to do, but we did not really know what it was, nor did we know what was happening. That day was the second day that we hadn't had food. I was suffering very, very badly!

So we got up from there, we were met and told, 'I am going home, the thing you have seen is what the men hide. So it even befits all of you that you should refrain from mentioning it.' So because we knew we were watched by the men, we held onto the secret tightly, like *batana*. We held on extremely tightly as those from long ago held on tightly. So we got up from that place. We came to a place where we were very glad. We came home. Afterwards we were told that we were *batana*. The thing which we had done had made us a *mutana*. We were so glad because we understood that we had passed the test. When we went we thought we were being killed. We were so happy that we had become the *batana* at that very hour. So we got up from that place and we were carrying *maghandala* (sticks). We got up from there with *maghandala*. We washed in the stream. We came out from there until we arrived at the Kiritone. When we came to the Kiritone, when we came to the Kiritone (dancing plaza) it was afternoon. We were seen at the gates and we sat there. So we left there because we would hide, until death, those words of the Batemi.

We were uncovered. Our ears were pierced, our ears were pierced. So then we were given *nangas* (dark red capes). We were told, now you are *batana*. For this reason your *nangas* show that each person should use it to cover himself. So we were given the *nanga* of the *batana*. They were divided between us, each person got one. Some wore the *nangas*, and others wore the skin capes. So we got up from there and we understood that we had become *batana*.

In the year 2003 after I had heard people preaching, I saw that these matters are no longer full of meaning. Before I had been saved I used to say, 'Men, on this earth, people are born, people are here as humans and we live, we breathe, we all eat, but where is God?' So that is what I was thinking about these questions. As I listened to the preaching of the people of God, I heard about a man called Jesus. Jesus rescues, and I had faith in Jesus (*edekela*) and was rescued. When Jesus comes again, those who go with him will go to heaven. So my spirit was lacking faith because I knew God and still I refused to leave those matters of the Batemi. So I sat, and sat, and I asked those questions. I was afraid to be saved because I was afraid of my relatives there, and being deserted by friends. So I was very much afraid. The next day, I saw that being afraid of a person does not have any meaning. It is better to be afraid of God. So a man named Joseph came, and Lulu. They helped my wife to repent as well. Then they told me, 'Let

us bring these words to God.’ I told them, ‘Since I have become a man, I have agreed with those words of God, and I agree to repent.’ So I got up from there and I repented, that was in 2003. From that time on I grew in faith, in all matters of fear relating to the Batemi, I have not been afraid of a person again. I have not been afraid, even though my friends separated themselves from me. My younger siblings have excluded me. They have excluded me, they have excluded me. They have excluded me, but I have not been excluded by God. So I have repented, and until this day I continue to go and speak here and there. On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and still I hold onto Jesus. I still continue with God, and I still pray that God would continue to help me so that I can grow in Jesus until he returns. So now I have reached this point so that all who are crying may know Jesus as the one who rescues, the one who rescues each person regardless of tribe, regardless of whether he knows the gravity of falsehood, like the thief. So I am telling you to have faith in Jesus.

### **10.5 List of Temi generation set names<sup>65</sup>**

1. Salonga
2. Ngoberi
3. Mbinoriga
4. Ghong’ata
5. Oringigurunguru
6. Olungiberi
7. Olunyangusi
8. Olunyoroni
9. Olurungide
10. Olundigoi
11. Olungori
12. Simbau
13. Njungeni
14. Oligisoni
15. Robiro
16. Shabai
17. Ngwerinido (Oligilobio)
18. Oligisaroni (Olimadidiani)
19. Olidediani (initiated 1955 acc. to Gray)
20. Oligibodi
21. Olimanjila

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<sup>65</sup> The names of the age-set 1-21 are from Rong’ola (1976:26)

22. Erumagero (1984)
23. Erugibali
24. Erumarwesi
25. Erumasyap (2011)

## 10.6 List of Bagwe (divinities)<sup>66</sup>

Egantwalu  
 Nankone  
 Nantwarere  
 Wakilemela  
 Wamwa Rioba  
 Wang'idang'ida  
 Wamwa Mweri  
 Ghambageu  
 Wagitaborogi  
 Wamwa Namaleda  
 Siyeda Yaro  
 Egamugongo  
 Eganserege  
 Message  
 Nkoma  
 Egamaligo  
 Negeki

## 10.7 Notes on the *esabya mai* ritual

*Esabya mai* is one kind of cleansing ritual the Batemi call *mbeeku* (derived from the verb *ebeeka*, to wear, to cover, to cleanse, to expiate). *Esabya mai* means literally to cleanse the water, and in implication the fields, and also the harvested crops. There are different types of *esabya mai* rituals. The most elaborate is when a new *mwenamijye* is installed. The incoming *mwenamijye*'s clan provides a sheep, a goat, or a cow which is

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<sup>66</sup> According to Rong'ola (1976, 28)

slaughtered at the time of the instalment. Another occasion for *esabya mai* is when the earth of the irrigated (*huura*) fields in the valley floor is profaned by a human burial. A third reason for holding an *esabya mai* ritual is when an initiated man enters the restricted area at the water springs without having observed a strict sexual abstinence of three months, or when he has entered the area without the explicit consent of the village council. The following description is based on field notes I took of an *esabya mai* practice which I was invited to attend:

In a last minute notice on Thursday evening, I received word that there would be a ritual offering called *esabya mai* on Friday morning. Apparently, Majaliwa Dasso, a 40 year old Mutemi who used to work as the SIL project office guard and is a member of the FPCT church, was accused of having entered the sacred spring area without permission, thus contaminating the water and breaking an important traditional taboo (*edabwa*). As a result of this transgression, his child has become ill without getting better even after having been treated at the hospital. The conclusion was that the child's illness was Majaliwa's fault, and that a cleansing ritual was necessary. Majaliwa, as a Christian, was not willing to produce the necessary goats and the money, but his relatives, specifically his father-in-law, insisted on it.

I asked Gaigi to talk to the village elders and see whether they would allow me to be present; they consented. Even so, I was not sure if they would all be in favor of my presence; it has happened before that Diniase has issued an invitation, and then one or two of the other elders objected and I had to withdraw. I thus arrived at their *ghuseri* meeting place above the Kiritone at 9 am (after having passed through the spring area, just to see if they had already started). The group of elders (around 5 or 6) just broke up from their meeting. Diniase was walking up to his house. Matei was there and some others. Mwemase (the son of Kagorise, & Tekiase's brother) was sitting there, too. I started talking to him, asking about his health (a long term skin disease). He said it was still the same; he had gone to seek help from the Baptist missionaries, but they could not identify the disease. He commented on the reason for his continuing ailment and other calamities, like the early death of his brother: 'I think that our father (Kagorise) has done something wrong in the past. The *etngɔ* failed to follow the rules of the ancestors. They have committed an offense which brought this suffering on our family.'

Mwemase was friendly and willing to engage (like his deceased brother Baba Huduma). An elder in a whitish coat gave a friendly smile and said: 'So, you are coming to see what we do today.' I surmised that they had all been informed. He later

said: ‘You are one of us, the *benamijye*. But you also went into the spring area, so you need to pay a fine of four goats. OK, ok, we can reduce it to two.’

Mwemase and another tall man (most likely Erumagero age-set) were asked to assist the elders with the ritual offering. I asked where the goats were; they pointed over to the other end of the Kiritone. I asked, ‘And the parents or relatives of Majaliwa?’ They told me, ‘They are down by the house that you just passed’(I had stopped on my way up and talked to two older women and a man sitting under a tree at Sisiase's house). There was some shouting across the Kiritone ‘Do you have a knife?’ ‘Yes, I got it.’ While the older *benamijye* were still preparing things, I walked along with Mwemase who took the two small goats (one black & white striped, the other brown), pulling them along the pathway towards the forested spring area. The goats, as if knowing what was going to happen to them, tried to resist the walk into the forest. We arrived ahead of anyone else at the place where the sacrifice was to take place. It is situated just under the large fig tree (according to Matei, the place where the first Mutemi used to cook and sacrifice) and only 10 metres from the stream, which is down a steep bank. Mwemase tied the goats to some small trees and started clearing the ground. Three stones indicated where a fire place used to be (although it looked as if it had not been in use for at least six months or more). After another 10 minutes, some elders showed up; they were carrying two tin cooking pots, two *birano* (gourd dishes), knives (one was a long hunting knife with ornaments, the Chinese type one can buy on the market), and one elder who carried a piece of burning wood (*kihande*) to start the fire. There were 5 elders (one of them a large man, the intermediary for Majaliwa), Diniase, Matei, Mondoise, and Mwemase and the other assistant. Later more *benamijye* showed up. They greeted each other briefly, then started to collect dry firewood from nearby, some using their bush-knives, tearing down branches from trees and cutting them into smaller pieces. The *kihande* piece was placed at the bottom of the fire place and dry dust on top, then larger pieces of wood. After some blowing, the fire flared up. The pots were filled with water from the stream and put on the fire. In the meantime the slaughtering process went on. Parts of the organs (lungs, kidney, heart, tripe) were placed in the water which started to boil. The livers were skewered on a stick and roasted on the side of the fire. The heads were battered with a rock, then also put on a stick and roasted. Matei scratched off the burned parts on the head pieces. The intestines, filled with *muyogo* (chime) were carried down to the stream and released into the stream by the elder in a white coat. The intestines were cleaned in the water, then put into the cooking pots.

The atmosphere among the elders was relaxed, people sitting with each other, exchanging domestic news. Mwemase was laughing and joking. Matei told me: 'The sacrifice cleanses the water, so that whoever drinks from it will receive a blessing.' Mondoise (an important leader in this ritual, performing the prayers) disappeared all of a sudden, with the rest of the elders wondering where he had gone. There was laughter when someone said that he had gone to get a drink (he had been given some money from Majaliwa's father-in-law). Mondoise returned later on. I talked to the other assistant, who told me that since he'd been initiated in 1984, he'd never entered the restricted area we were in. He said, 'It is our law and I respect it. Since time immemorial our fathers have done this cleansing sacrifice right here (pointing to the fire place) and nothing will ever stop it.'

Once the liver was roasted, it was distributed, first to Diniase, then to others. The stick with the liver was placed in front of Diniase and they started to cut off small pieces and eat them without any further ado. They offered some meat to me, but I declined, explaining that I only came as a visitor, and that this was their celebration. They laughed, but did not further insist that I ate some meat. Gradually more elders arrived, some through the upper path, others along the stream. One man in a modern suit (like a school teacher) cried out: 'Klaus, what are you doing here? This is the real worship, none of the Swiss stuff you do there ... This the way we do it.' He was quite drunk and interjected remarks later on when they sat in a circle discussing the subject matter of their gathering. Henrise (the priest) also made an appearance, greeted the group, sat down, brought forth a plastic bag into which they put a piece of meat, and soon disappeared again. There were pieces of the meat left over on the two skins; Mwemase said that these go to the *bantu* (people). Towards the end of the ceremony, after the prayers, the leg pieces were distributed among the participants in equal measures. Mwemase and the other assistant also received their share for helping.

Two places with green leafy branches were prepared and the cooked meat was distributed. Everyone (except the assistants) gathered around and started to eat. The meat was devoured pretty quickly. One elder cut a wooden prong and started to use it with the remaining soup, carefully removing pieces of fat from the broth. He then distributed the broth by pouring it into the *birano* (gourd dishes) and the elders drank out of it. There was no salt added to meat or soup. At one point, an organ (the heart?) was wrapped in the goat skin and then pounded on a rock several times (to soften it?), then also put into the boiling pot. Diniase walked along the stream, cleaning it from leaves and twigs, then returned.



Majaliwa's in-law walked around, seeming a bit uneasy, and only eating a little bit. After the meal, he sat with the elders and briefly addressed them: 'I have come and have brought the goats (*sedani*) because the *mwana* (child) has entered this place.' The silence of the elders sounded like a consent. Only Mwemase cried out, half to himself, half to all of them: 'Oh, has he indeed entered this place?!' Mondoise started to place money (several 5 and 10 thousand shilling bills) in front of him (because some were still eating) and then distributed it; each elder was given about 30,000/- TZS. They looked at it, counted it briefly, and placed it by the side. Finally, Sisiase stood up (he had been sick recently and was not walking well), and, while facing the forest & springs, addressed the group and said a prayer which lasted about two minutes. The group answered with their consent: '*Hau, hau*' (amen). I heard the names of Mesaga and Ghulubeda (but not Ghambageu, Kirimo or Mugwe). When he finished, Mondoise stood up and said a prayer in similar fashion. Once the prayers were said and the meal finished, people started to collect their remaining pieces of uncooked meat and dispersed.

## 10.8 Maps and Photographs

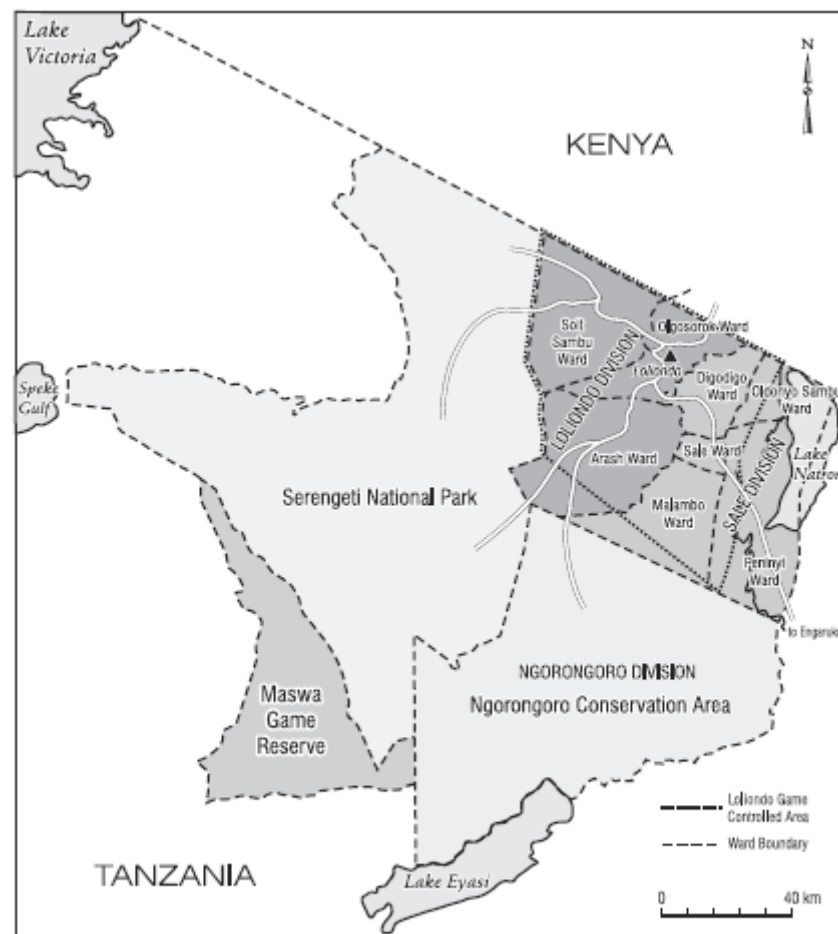
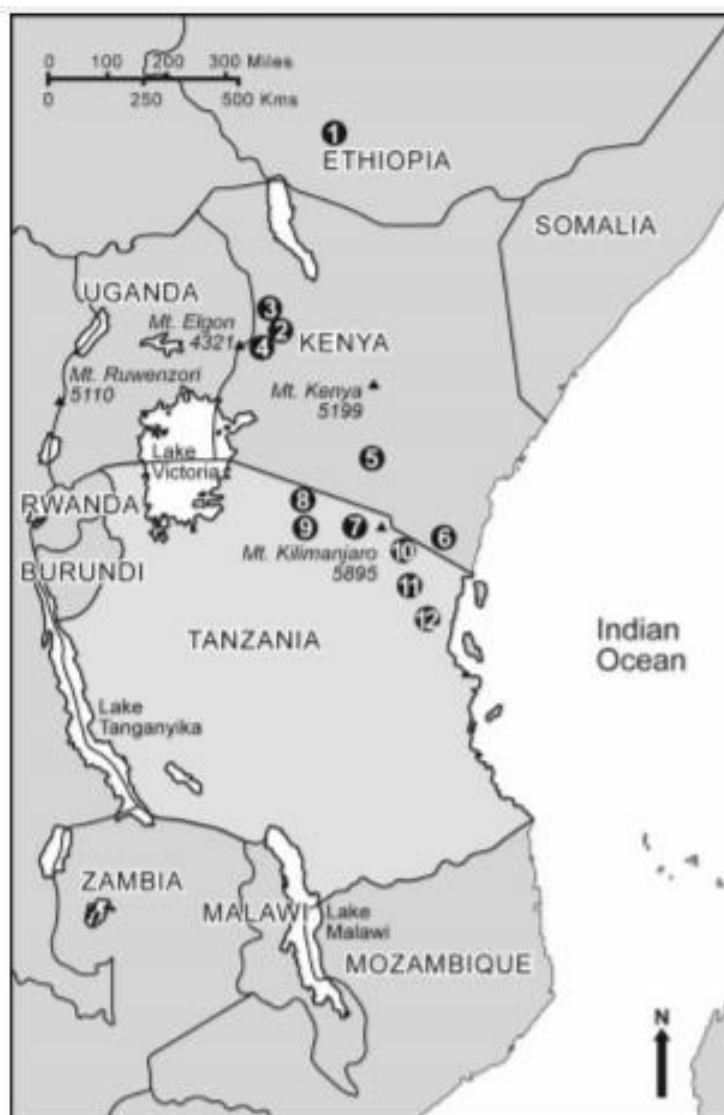


Figure 2. The case study area of the Loliondo and Sale Divisions bordering Kenya and the nature reserves of the Serengeti National Park (SNP) and the Ngorongoro Division which contains the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA).

*Map 10.1 Temi area with surrounding divisions (Ojalammi 2006)*



**Locations mentioned:**

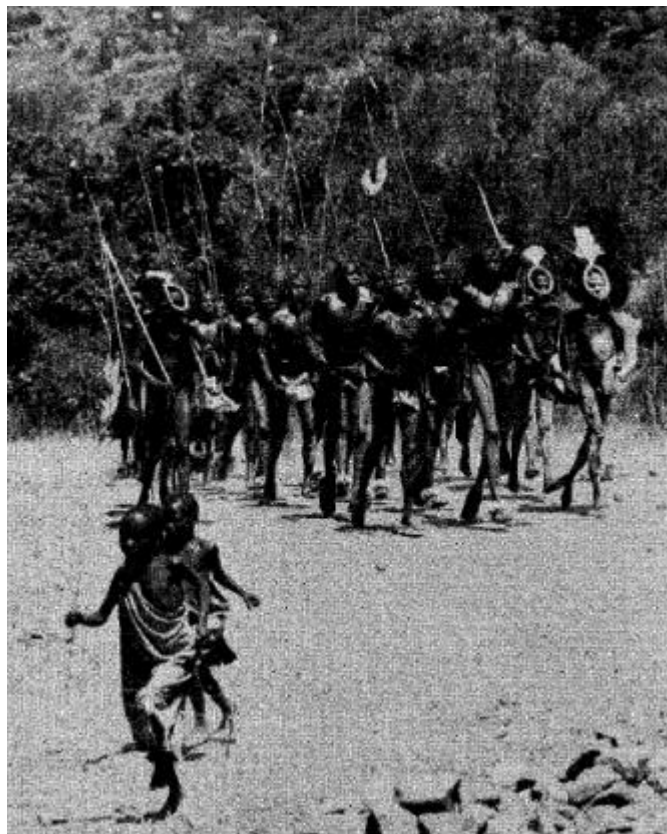
- |                 |                         |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Konso        | 7. Mt. Meru             |
| 2. Kerio Valley | 8. Sonjo                |
| 3. Pokot        | 9. Engaruka             |
| 4. Marakwet     | 10. North Pare (Mwanga) |
| 5. Machakos     | 11. South Pare (Same)   |
| 6. Taita        | 12. Usambara Mts.       |

*Fig. 1. Location of Mt. Kilimanjaro in eastern Africa.*

*Map 10.2 Irrigation clusters in East Africa (Tagseth, 2008)*



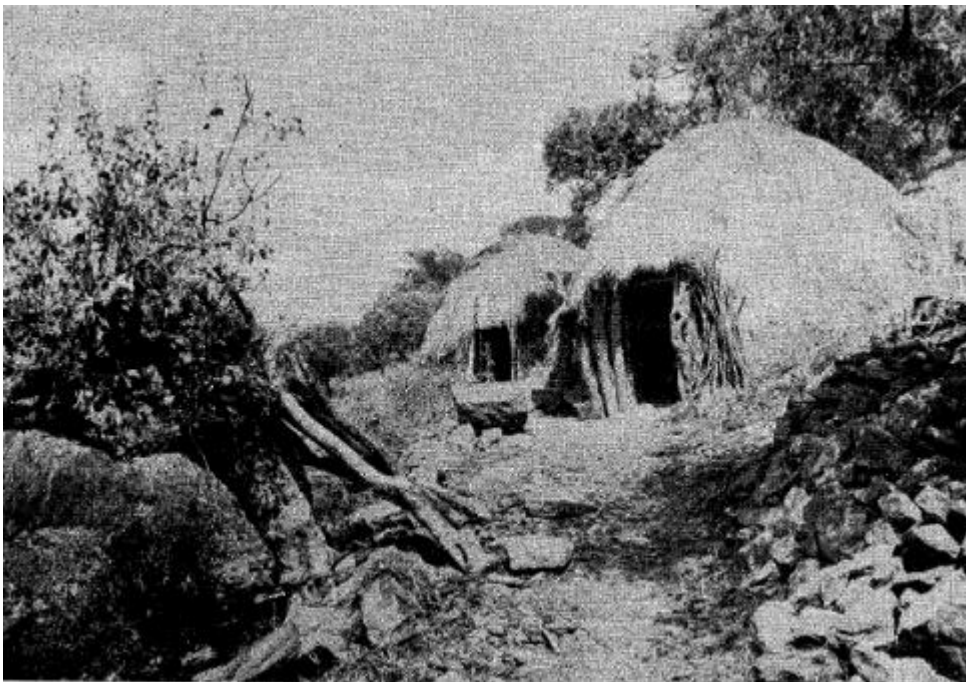
*Photograph 10.1 Fortified village gate (kijomi) in the 1950s (from Gray, 1962)*



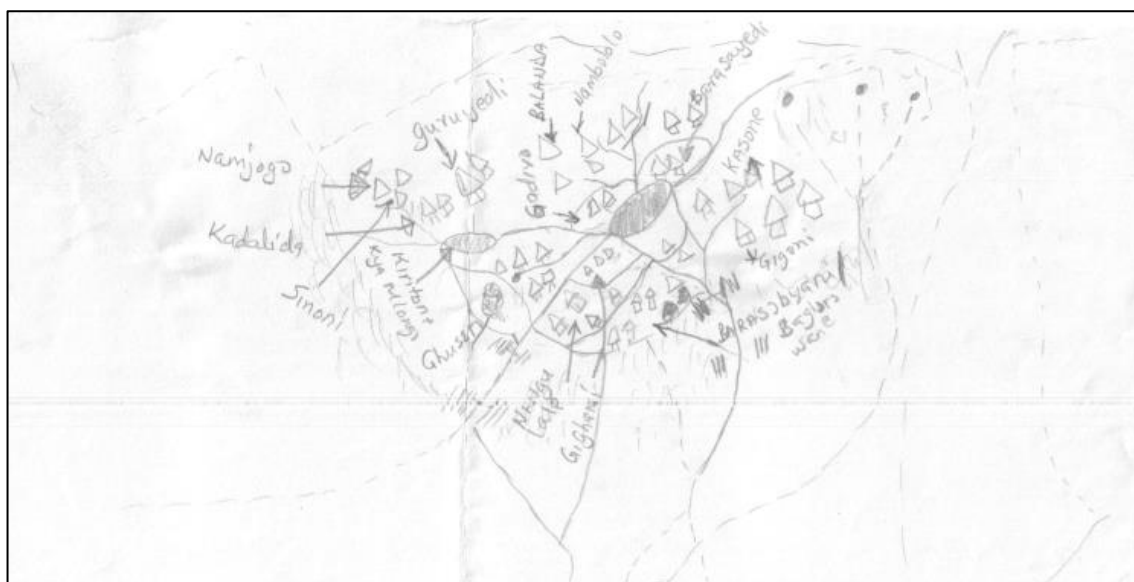
*Photograph 10.2 Mbarimbari celebrations 1955 (from Gray, 1962)*



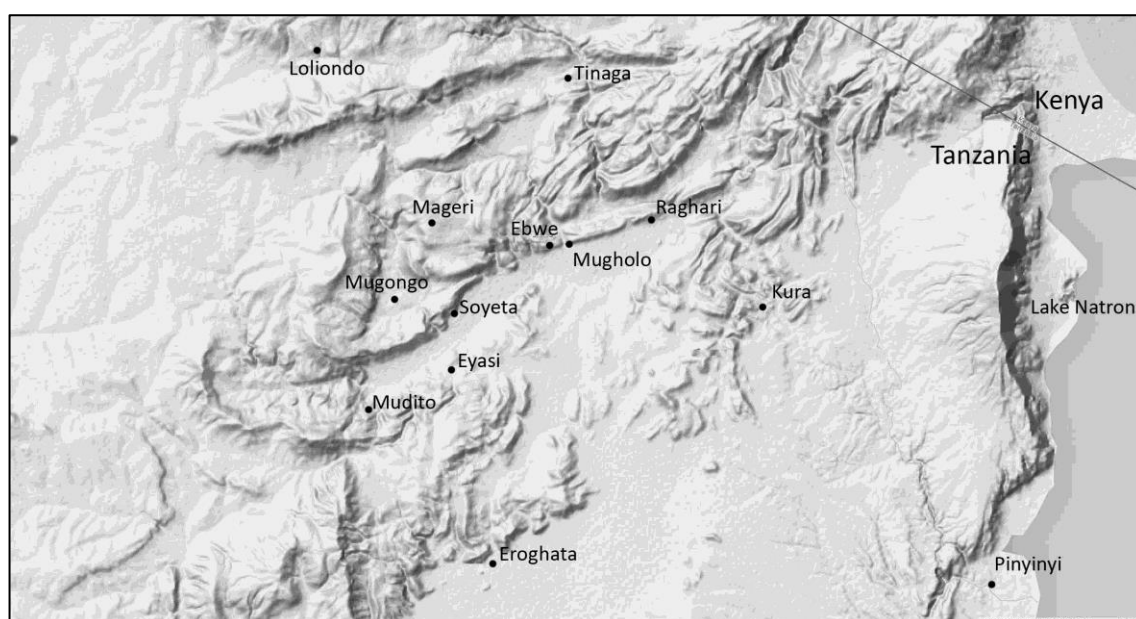
*Photograph 10.3 Batana dancing at mbarimbari (from Gray, ca. 1955)*



*Photograph 10.4 Temi houses pictured by Gray (1955)*



*Map 10.3 Ebwe clans and territories (Sketch by ES, Ebwe)*



*Map 10.4 Butemine and the major villages (KD)*

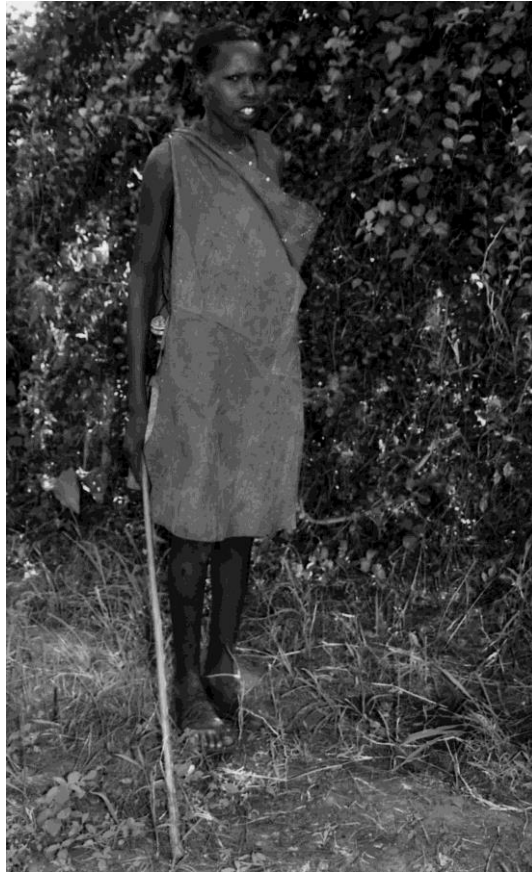


*Map 10.5 Ghɔrɔwane shrines in Ebwe (KD)*

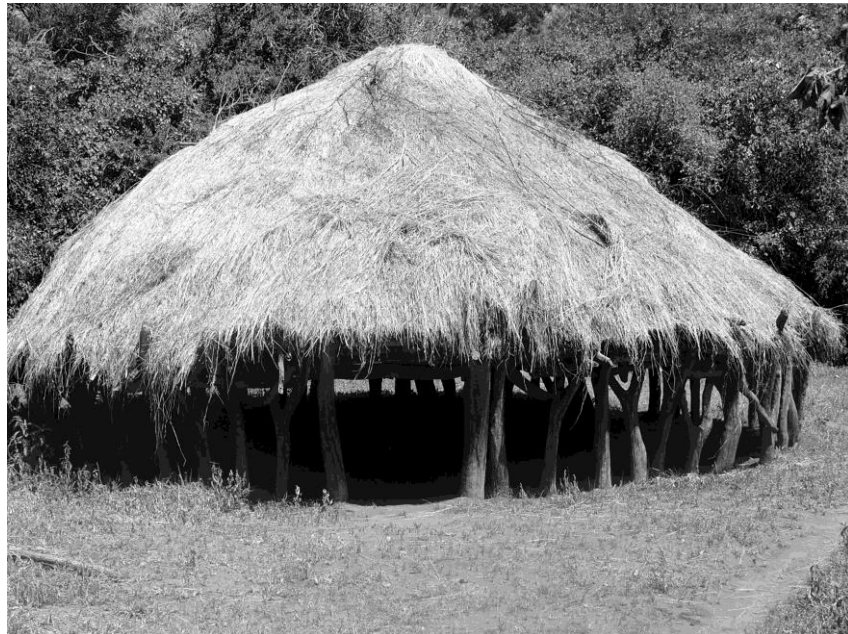


*Photograph 10.5 Elders instructing batana dancers at mbarimbari (KD)*





*Photograph 10.6 Novice after initiation (KD)*



*Photograph 10.7 Mutala jwa kijomi - initiation shelter (KD)*





*Photograph 10.8 Ebwe benamijye with beehives (KD)*



*Photograph 10.9 Kibumbuku shelter on dancing plaza with offering site (KD)*



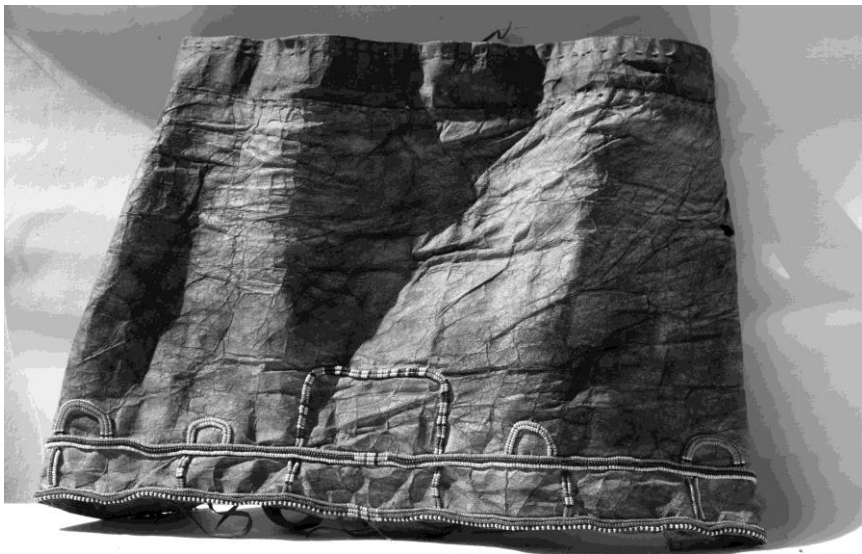
*Photograph 10.10 Bijjori dancing (KD)*



*Photograph 10.11 Jesters at mbarimbari celebration (KD)*



*Photograph 10.12 Leather skirt of unmarried girls (ghabyeka) (KD)*



*Photograph 10.13 Leather skirt of married women (musuuru) (KD)*



*Photograph 10.14 Large beer container (nsoha) (KD)*



*Photograph 10.15 Head dress used at mbarimbari celebration (KD)*



*Photograph 10.16 Wooden ornament worn at mase (ng'aroyyi) (KD)*



*Photograph 10.17 Ornamented stick carried by initiates (nang'uri) (KD)*



*Photograph 10.18 Set of Kudu horns*



*Photograph 10.19 Elder spreading chyme into the stream (KD)*



*Photograph 10.20 Benamijye during a ritual near the water source (KD)*

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The primary sources are fieldnotes, interviews, and recordings of myth stories, songs, prayers, and historical recollections. I differentiated between audio recordings of narrative stories or poetic expressions, and interviews. The data is marked with the name of the contributor and the date of the recording. The reference to fieldnotes are labelled NB (Notebook) with the date of entry. A further primary source is the Gitemi dictionary with over 4,300 entries. The Appendix contains samples of myths, initiation reports, fieldnotes, and photographic illustrations.

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